PRICE SIXPENCE

A FRIEND'S VICTIM

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS

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NOW IS ON THE BANNER OF THE PRUDENT.
NOW YOU CAN CHANGE THE TRICKLING STREAM, BUT TO-MORROW YOU MAY HAVE THE RAGING TORRENT TO CONTEND WITH.

IN THE BATTLE OF THIS LIFE ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" is an imperative hygienic need, or necessary adjunct. It keeps the blood pure, prevents fevers and acute inflammatory diseases, removes the injurious effects of stimulants, narcotics, such as alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, by natural means; thus restores the nervous system to its normal condition by preventing the great danger of poisoned blood or over-cerebral activity, sleeplessness, irritability, worry, etc.

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A FRIEND'S VICTIM

BY

ALTON HURLBA

LONDON
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THIS VOLUME

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO MY TRI
TRUSTED FRIEND

MR. FREDERIC PEAKE

As a Souvenir

OF HALCYON DAYS IN FOREIGN LAN

A FRIEND'S VICTIM.

I.

One November evening about eight years ago I arrived at Charing Cross from the continent on my return from a trip through France and Italy. The circumstances of this trip were peculiar. My return was a response to a telegram referring to an important business matter. Previously I had been ill for some time. Care, anxiety and overwork had much abused my nervous system, and my continental tour had been taken in the hope of restoring my mind and nerves to their natural strength and vigour. In this I was partially successful. I had gained flesh and strength, my nervous system had found poise, and but for the peculiar events and thrilling experiences which greeted me even in the hour of my return to the metropolis, I might have remained for years strong in nerve and arm, my hair at the age of forty might still be black, my face unshadowed, my step elastic.

As I take my pen in hand to record the events which have rendered my life's dream a horrible nightmare, I realize many readers may deem my tale improbable, unnatural, untrue, yet every day even in our midst plots are born and nurtured, crimes are committed and soon forgotten, while victims innumerable walk by our side, breathing the free air of heaven, yet bearing a weight of woe even time and the sunlight of nature cannot lighten. Such souls are left to cry out in dismay as does my

own: "Great God, Thou only dost know why mortals are thus tried!"

As I write my fingers become like things of ice, tears fall and blur my manuscript, and I almost wish that memory would loosen her ruthless grasp and steal away, leaving the past a blank.

It is a cold night, and as I write the fire of my study flickers and beams. I pause awhile, searching the hot coals with my eyes. Each flame as it darts upward from its bed of molten coal suggests a thought to me, for memory is strange, and my mind, returning to the past, recalling those days of pleasure followed so quickly by days of pain, is crowded with events, like the driftwood of a surging flood—events I had thought dead even to memory years ago. In this pause I have been impressed with the thought that I have a confession to make as well as a tale to tell. A glowing spark flying in mad haste up the chimney recalls some joyful, halcyon day, a sullen flame endeavouring to hide beneath the coal reminds me of some wrong-doing, some mis-step and fall of my own. But this confession I will let take care of itself, and develop with the telling of my story. Open confession under certain circumstances may be well, but not always. It is better for us, better for him, that we know the weaknesses or evil of a friend or enemy by coming in contact with them, rather than by a confessed self-knowledge of wickedness, weakness or wrong.

But to return to that November evening when I arrived at Charing Cross.

I was companionless. In the throng about me there was not a friend nor even a familiar face. A sort of longing to meet some one possessed me, for I had been away several months.

In looking for other faces that I might know, I could not help recalling one very dear to me—the face of a friend I had left in Italy. A friend who had been tried and trusted for many years; a friend who had remained in all things sincere.

To tell the truth he was almost the hero of my own life, were such a thing possible, for I had few friends and had never known a brother, so my interest in things earthly seemed to centre in the life of this companion. His name was Tito Salvi, by birth an Italian, as the name implies; by profession a musician of unusual talent. For the present let this short description suffice. I will tell more about him as my story continues.

As I stepped from the train the desire to see some one whom I knew took such full possession of me that I passed the ordeal of the Customs' examination vacantly, so intently was I looking into the faces about me. I knew I should find my trunk in the cloak-room. It had been sent by Tito direct from Florence, while I broke the journey, stopping two days at the Italian lakes, and one in Paris. I have said Customs' examination. I should rather have said the oral catechising of the official as he demanded had I any dutiable articles to declare, for (as seems strange to me every time I think of it) my trunk was not examined, as is sometimes the case, but marked and labelled without opening, and carried with a number of others to the entrance end of the station.

My heart seemed to beat with more regularity than it had for years, the blood coursed through my veins with the rapidity of youth, and I mentally anticipated the congratulations of my friends when they should see my improved condition. I felt quite alone amid the hurrying crowds passing to and from the carriages. The shifting of baggage, the calling of cabmen, and the cries of the newsboys, all sounded familiarly like the remembered sounds of a dream, for I was intently looking for some one whom I might recognize.

I was glad to be once more in Old England. There is always a feeling of loneliness on arriving in a great city companionless and at night, but I had never felt so lonely before. I experienced a sort of sinking sensation at heart as I crossed

the platform, passed the news-stands, and the piles of unclaimed baggage. At a glance I picked out my own box, and having hailed a cab, I motioned a porter to take it to the vehicle.

The evening was raw and chilly. Cab wheels creaked with the frost as they rolled out of the station on the hard, frozen ground.

I distinctly remember it was when standing beside the cab waiting for my trunk to be placed upon it, that a sharp chill almost convulsed my frame. The cause of this I immediately supposed to be due to the sudden change from the hot, confined atmosphere of the railroad carriage to the penetrating November night air. I turned around somewhat quickly, as I rolled up the collar of my great coat. My eyes fell upon the figure of a man standing in the doorway of the waiting room, gazing intently at me. He was a friend of Tito's; I had seen him once before. Our eyes met for an instant only; the next he had gone. Instinctively I felt *he had caused this chill and shudder!*

I had travelled all night. I felt fatigued and longed to secure some lodgings. I smiled undecidedly as I wondered what interest the stranger in the doorway could have in me.

"Not so 'eavy as many of its size," said the porter—I supposed sarcastically, in hopes of getting an extra sixpence—as he threw my trunk upon the cab. I gave him a shilling for his trouble, and jumped in, ordering the cabman to drive to No. —— Russell Square, for I was eager to arrive at some familiar destination.

I had lodged at No. —— before and knew the landlady to be an amiable body who would do her best to make me comfortable. But I was no sooner on my way passing the familiar buildings and monuments of Pall Mall and Regent Street ere I began to question myself and wonder why I had decided to stop at No. ——, or why go to Russell Square at all. I had

lodged in equally comfortable apartments elsewhere; besides there were a number of hotels within a stone's throw of Charing Cross. I felt that my mind, for some unaccountable reason, was confused. I had decided on my destination without forethought. *Fate* as well as Mr. Cabby, held the lines, and I was bound to follow whither she led. My mind was influenced by an unseen power and an unseen agency.

I settled back, allowing the cabman to drive on. The rumbling of the vehicle seemed an accompaniment to my thoughts, which in themselves were tranquil enough; but a nervous, creeping sensation of dread possessed me which I could neither shake off nor understand. I became moody and perplexed. The kaleidoscope of my human existence brought before my mind a series of symmetrical pictures irresponsive to my will; but I no sooner attempted to fathom the significance of one picture than it vanished and another equally as vague presented itself. I fell to thinking of the past, of my friend in Italy, of the many years we had spent together, of the follies and vices of which we had both borne a part. Then a feeling of satisfaction came to me, as I dwelt upon his great talent and his last musical composition, and realized what a place and name he was making for himself in the musical world. He often told me I was an encouragement to him, and to tell the truth no brother could have been more proud of Tito than I was.

I looked into the passing crowd without seeing. My mental vision was far away in the sunny South—far away amid those scenes from which I was only just returning. I had roamed all over Tito's native Italy, with him for my sole companion. Together we had been interested in its paintings, sculpture music and people. From the ruins of Pompeii, through the darkened courts of Naples where many a dark-skinned street singer and starving artist were known to us, to the tip-top hamlets of the Alps we had wandered together for months at

a time. His was a magnanimous nature which had battled with the world and its vicissitudes, and thereby grown appreciative of noble instincts and talents though they might be clothed by a pauper's habiliments. Many a discouraged artist had taken heart at his advice and monetary help which was never lacking when needed, and many half crazed models had been saved from the Bay of Naples, or a worse fate, by his warm-hearted interest in their behalf.

Reader, I pause to put one question: Have you ever experienced that wonderful psychical phenomenon when one feels that the soul is existing independent of its prison—the body, when the functions of the body seem to have become separated from the senses? I know not if, even once in a lifetime, it comes to everybody, but that is what I seemed to experience that night. My body lived in a waking sleep, while my intangible mind, drawn by some occult influence (perhaps sympathy), wandered far away, and for aught I knew, really existed 'mid other scenes, in another country. My mind seemed passive, hardly reflective and was being *acted upon* rather than acting with spontaneity.

I must have been in this half waking, half dreaming state some time, for we had reached the corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street, when standing on the sidewalk, directly opposite the window of my carriage, I saw, or thought I saw, my friend, the form and features of Tito Salvi. I called to the driver to stop, and in a second more had opened the door and sprang to the pavement. I even stretched forth my hand in hearty recognition of the friend I loved so well. But he had gone—the vision, if it was such, had vanished.

The cabman must have thought me mad, for I rubbed my eyes with my fist and gazed into the faces of the passing throng, staring blankly. It was several seconds before I could collect my scattered senses. I wondered whether they were taking leave of me altogether, but I soon realized that my

imagination had played me a clever trick. So, forcing a smile I again sprang into my carriage and ordered cabby to "drive on."

My mind, however, was not at rest. Although I had never been in the least superstitious, as I now look back upon that November evening I fully realize without prejudice how truly coming events cast their shadows before.

The feeling of dread which I had experienced increased tenfold as the driver whipped up and we again rolled on. My heart seemed to have lost its regular beat and was thumping spasmodically. The veins swelled on my temples as the blood coursed feverishly through them. Had I contracted fever on the continent? Was I about to be seriously ill? Why were my hands like ice? Why did my limbs seem to stiffen and stretch themselves like the limbs of a dying man?

"No, no," I said in answer to my thoughts, "I am not ill, these unusual symptoms of burning pain, this fevered brain and beating heart, the emotions of all my functions are caused by the influence of an unknown, exterior power, by the workings of an unknown hand."

Intuitively I realized my condition and its cause. I was the victim of a presentiment. Some future event in my life was struggling to make itself known, and to cast its warning shadow upon my consciousness. My soul was being burdened by a doom no power on earth could avert. I was helpless. I could not disbelieve the truth or power of that influence which had taken possession of my being, and was welding the materials of future misery into a bar of crushing weight above my head, and weaving a pall of mystery about me from which I could not escape. And in all this dream but one name lingered on my ear, but one face imprinted itself upon the retina of my eye. It was the name and face of Tito Salvi. My soul seemed to call out his name over and over again, while my lips became parched and immovable.

"Great God, Tito!" I heard myself exclaim, while my voice produced no sound. "*Tito is dead!*"

For a moment I felt crushed even by the thought. For one moment my soul seemed to struggle as if to free itself from its prison of clay, and fly to him whom I intuitively felt had died. But it was for a moment only that this intense agony of mind lasted; for after I had once acknowledged to myself that Tito Salvi was undoubtedly ill or dead, then my heart ceased its petulant beating. I could feel the tension of my nerves ease a little. Warmth began to creep into my benumbed fingers, and I experienced all the sensations of one waking from sleep.

"My friend is dead. God has willed it, and Tito Salvi is dead," I whispered to myself. For some unaccountable reason I felt temporarily reconciled to the most melancholy affliction which could have befallen me, and this reconciliation to the inevitable, which I could not understand, proved to be beyond a doubt that I had not been suffering from an illusion, or a waking nightmare, but a veritable presentiment of truth. I knew that tears burst from my eyes, so unnerved did I become as I recalled our last parting, his voice and smile when he said: "*Addio,* I will meet you soon in London if you are obliged to remain there." This was the night I left Florence. The shedding of those few tears was the only sign of weakness I made—surely it was pardonable. The Emperor Hadrian is said to have wept like a woman, when Antinous, his favourite, was taken from him.

The carriage stopped, for we had reached No. —— Russell Square. With considerable calmness and restraint after my great agitation, I stepped to the pavement. As I did so I observed the sky was cloudy and the stars hidden. My lungs filled with the cool night air and I felt refreshed. In a few moments the bell had been rung and I was informed by the servant that the house was full, I could not be accommodated. This contingency had not occurred to me,

but as the servant closed the door it came to my mind that a few squares down and around the corner I should find a small hotel. Involuntarily I turned my head to learn who had spoken, yet I had heard no voice. I only *felt* an incomprehensible influence bearing upon me. My actions although in a certain sense spontaneous did not seem to emanate from my own will. Nor did I ever remember having seen or heard of this small hotel to which I was being led by some occult power.

Mechanically, I turned to the driver and said, "There is an hotel two squares below, around the corner," and I pointed in the direction I wished him to go.

A few drops of rain fell as we started. Fifteen minutes later I found myself in a comfortable room on the second floor of a small family hotel, which had a red lantern burning over the door, and was much frequented by foreigners like many of the small hotels in the region of Russell Square.

I felt fatigued after my journey and the unnerving experiences of the last half hour, but that was only natural.

The apartment was somewhat scantily furnished, containing only the usual requisites of a modest bedroom. The bed, however, looked comfortable, and this fact in my present condition gave more satisfaction than could the most costly furniture and hangings.

I drew a chair near the fire and listened to the dreary sound made by the beating rain. This cheerless noise created in me a feeling of desertion which even the bright glow of the fire could not dissipate, and this feeling coupled with my previous disquietude made the room seem even more cheerless than it really was.

There is but one remedy for one's spirits under such conditions. I rang the bell and ordered the maid to bring some brandy and hot water. In truth I was in need of some stimulant. The girl was unusually quick in responding to my

request—perhaps she thought I looked ill. She placed the bottle and glass on the table and then hurried away without even asking did I require anything else. When she had gone and the warm liquor had revived and rested me somewhat, I sat down upon my trunk, as travellers are wont to do, and traced the faded figures of the dingy carpet with my eyes, wondering the while what course I had better pursue.

I must confess that since the stimulant had entered my veins, I was half inclined to comtemplate my presentiment ironically, and laugh at my foolish fears. Ah! how little we understand the workings of our own minds, or the marvellous channels of magnetism! My first impulse was to telegraph to Tito, or one of our friends who could give, or be likely to give me some information in regard to his condition. But why obey impulse? I should gain little by telegraphing that night, a message sent early the next morning would suffice. After all, I hopefully thought, Tito might be ill, and not dead. The presentiment I had received might mean almost anything.

With this thought half cheating me into a comfortable mood, I began to unpack my satchel and to deposit its contents in a bureau drawer. Then I turned to my trunk to take therefrom some necessaries I should require early. A weakness once more crept over me as I remembered how many reminiscences of poor Tito it contained. Just as I was about to insert the key I heard a knock on the door behind me. I turned from my purpose, crossed the room and opened the door. It was the maid; she had come to inform me that the adjoining room to mine was occupied by two strange men who held spiritual séances at night and were apt to be a little noisy.

"But they have paid their bill, so I suppose they are leaving in the morning," she added, with evident satisfaction and relief. I replied that I was not easily annoyed, and owing to my fatigued condition I should probably rest undisturbed.

"I 'ope so, sir," she answered, and disappeared down the stairs. I closed and locked the door, then returned to my trunk, inserted the key, and threw up the lid. What was my surprise to see at a glance its contents had been trifled with. My first thought was that it had been broken into and robbed; but no, nothing was missing. I took out two or three coats, then some books, and piled them on the bed. As I did so an envelope, with my name upon it, protruding from a pocket, attracted my eye. The name was in Tito's handwriting. The envelope was sealed. With an intensified foreboding of ill I tore it open. There was a letter, and folded within this letter a ring—a diamond. A ring I immediately recognized as my first gift to Tito Salvi—a souvenir of some six years before. During those six years I knew it had never left his finger. Now, as I looked at it, wondering what potent meaning its sudden appearance could have, each sparkle and ray of light shot forth from its facets seemed to tell me in some incomprehensible language that perhaps our friendship had come to an end—that Tito had at last grown weary of a companion who through exacting years of selfish intimacy had taken all, giving nothing in return.

"Oh! I have been a poor friend indeed," I sighed, "little worthy of him who in every act and thought was more unselfish than a brother—more magnanimous and untiring than the closest intimacy would warrant." Then I turned my eyes upon the letter and read:—

"*Caro Paul:*—

"I am about to send your trunk as you requested, and as you left no London address save that of your banker, I will, in response to a strange desire to write you, send this letter that you may hear from me immediately on your arrival. It is now early morning, and I shall not finish writing before evening, as your trunk cannot leave till then. I have a desire to tell you something, yet know not what it is. Would to God I

had left Italy with you, for since your departure, some undue, overwhelming sense of doom has hung about me. You know I once told you of my family—things you could not understand—a word or two of secrets you dare not believe, because I feared the horror of knowing all the truth might ruin that which had bound us inseparably together. It was murder I feared would come between us, and now that you are gone, with an almost insane apprehension and presentiment I taste murder in the air I breathe; I see it in the glance of my sister's eye; everything I touch seems to have the sharpness of a dagger's blade. Perhaps my words seem cold to you as you read, yet you can see that any hand as well as my own might have penned these lines—for my hand trembles, and an absurd frenzy masters me. Now I am laughing—a sort of mad, hysterical laugh at all the nonsense of my thoughts and foolish words."

Here I stopped reading. Had a man ever received such an absurd, incomprehensible letter before! Had Tito gone crazy? Was insanity the untold story of my friend's family? I remembered now Tito had no address except my London banker—a letter sent there would not be delivered to me till the following morning, hence his reason for enclosing this one in the trunk. My eye fell again upon the mysterious sheet. As yet not a word about the ring. What I had read undoubtedly had been written in the morning two days before. What had transpired before that night—what since that day? I continued to read:—

"Now I am serious again. Paul, you remember Coracio. You met him once when we were in Milan. I never told you his secret nor the story of our intimate relationship. *O per Dio!* Paul, how now I wish you had opened my dumb lips, and dragged forth from my tongue the truth my pride and fear would not let me disclose. Again a horrid sense of evil creeps over me. I am fated; there is no hope—like others of my

family I shall be murdered—yes, murdered, when in utter helplessness——"

The words swam before my eyes. For the first time I linked this horrid, mysterious letter with the presentiment of an hour before. Had I seen in very truth the body of my friend, cold and stark before my eyes, no greater would have been my belief that some damning fate had overtaken him. Murder! Coracio!! Had I not seen him but now, on my arrival in the city? What power had he to freeze my blood by a glance, as if his look had been electric and left a scar as of hell's fire upon my soul? Suffering, acute and unspeakable, filled me once more, my blood did boil and foam, becoming froth in my veins, almost bursting from my eyes and nostrils. Oh, reader! can you for one moment only, as you scan these lines, feel the black hand of suffocation clasp upon your throat, as I felt a power clinch mine as if to strangle me; if, I say, you could know for one moment the pangs with which my being fought, you might then be able to appreciate my condition as with occult realization I knew my friend was dead and, in imagination vivid as life, saw him stretched before my sight—a murderer's victim. My eyes seemed to turn in their sockets and lose sight for aught else. The elements of the very air whirled and united together into his form that I might see him lying dead—a shadowy, gaseous, misty thing to view, yet tangible and solid in its telling of the murderous fact. I saw the ghostly lips move; and the well-known voice, clear, yet strangled, cried out my name and filled my soul with a cry to God for vengeance. I saw no scar nor sign of violence upon the form. His face uncovered looked upward, and from it shone a radiance which illumined itself, but threw the room and all its objects into the blackness of night. I am describing the undying picture of a living nightmare as I saw it then,

as I see it now, as I shall see it for ever and ever till death plucks vision from my eyes.

For a time, I think, reason left me. I stood utterly motionless fearing that the drawing of my own living breath would dissipate the vision which I hoped might speak again. I can partially remember what I did, for the intelligent impressions I received were stamped too indelibly upon my mind to be even now indistinctly blurred. At last I moved, but the form remained before me. I thought to throw my arms about my friend, to fall upon him and breathe the breath of life from my lungs into his, as if with all the energy of madness to bring some sign of life back to the composed features. Once I thought him sleeping in reality before me, for the look upon his face was fearfully life-like, with no change of colour only pallor, and quite full of peace, for there was no blood, no scar, nor sign of violence.

I gazed a long time, helplessly, half hoping that the glow of animation would come to it. Then a change came over me—a sort of suspension of the senses, a feeling of suffocation. The room became dark as unlighted midnight. No object made any impression upon the retina of my eye, save the dead form before me. Thank God! in that hour of fearful anguish I could not realize my own grief—had it been otherwise I would have gone mad.

Hours must have passed and I had scarcely moved. The fire on the hearth had burned nearly out. At length I awoke, but any effort of mine to tell just how the waking came, and what strange condition between dreamland and reality possessed me, would be fruitless. It was as if a vision had absorbed my mind and left vacancy on departure. Amid this phantasmagoria of a waking dream, the first truth which made itself clear to my mind was the fact that I was *not alone.*

The door leading to the adjoining room stood open. The

gas in my own apartment had been turned down. In the semi-light I saw three figures moving towards me. With a firm grasp one of the three figures laid his hand upon my arm. I could not move a limb or muscle—nor speak nor make a sign. Spontaneous animation was suspended. *I was mesmerized.*

II.

AND now, reader, will you allow me to devote a page or two to retrospection?

At an early age I adopted authorship as a profession. Not because I believed myself to possess any unusual degree of talent in that field. Nor was it that I looked forward to the goal of accomplishment with any hopes of making a grand success. On the contrary, I believe I was at the starting of my career unusually modest in my ambitions. But from childhood I loved books.

My temperament was a melancholy, not to say a morbid one. My parents dying when I was a mere boy, I was left to choose my way in life, with the knowledge that at the age of twenty-one, I was to become sole heir to my father's large fortune. I had a taste for travel and the languages, and could have easily excelled as a linguist. At the age of twenty I had become familiar with the classics of the four modern languages, and never wearied wandering through the labyrinths of historical fact and fiction as handed down to us by the old masters. My first published composition was a treatise on the Latin and Italian authors. I suppose my nature was ever artistic, for with little study or application I gained a not superficial knowledge of the different branches of art—particularly music and paint-

ing. Of music I was passionately fond. Orpheus could at any time draw me from my work and cause my pen to drop from my hand: to this deity I lay the blame of many an unfinished manuscript.

I have intimated that my temperament was almost a morbid one. I kept from society. My books became friends to me; they took the place of men and women. In them I found, for many years, a companionship that the world had in no other way revealed to me. For a time I was satisfied, but not for long. The human side of my nature needed human sympathies, required a wider human knowledge. There came a dissatisfaction, then a void pregnating all things in which I was interested. The products of my pen became lifeless, lacking fruition. My apartment grew lonely; the many works of art I had gathered about me failed to please. The power of appreciation seemed to be slipping away. The truth dawned upon me: I was becoming an ascetic. Some change in my surroundings and conditions must be made, but how was this to be accomplished? The question grew to be a problem I could not solve. Travelling did not satisfy me; it was a remedy which could not reach the diseased function. I laid aside my manuscripts, closed my massive classic volumes of reference with a feeling at heart as if guilty of deserting old friends, for my heart seemed to be shutting itself against the best part of the world I had yet investigated.

I had never contemplated marriage. I had known but few women in any sense intimately; these did not attract me. No, the void was one no woman could fill—the unrest, the disquietude was something even a wife could not satisfy. I realized that I was considered a handsome man, and I had also heard many times that more than one of the matrons in my neighbourhood considered me an eligible *parti* for their daughters. But even the fascination of these beautiful daughters did not charm me; my heart remained stone to all the women I had

ever met. So you plainly see, reader, marriage for me would have been an unfortunate step, and therefore was simply out of the question. I fully believe some men are not born to matrimony. Too many marriages have proved fatal to happiness. Perhaps this is my plea for remaining a bachelor so many years. I have said this much, that the condition of my mind and life may be known at the time I first met Tito Salvi.

I remember well the evening. The month was June. The day one of those serene days which gladden all the earth. Even London put on a dusky smile of cheerfulness. I remember the day as one of the brightest of the pleasantest season of the year. In spite of Nature's propitious aspect, from the early morning of that day I felt dissatisfied, distressed. Nothing pleased me. My mind seemed troubled and vacant. Before noon I wandered into Hyde Park. Even the sun shedding rays from a cloudless sky, and the flower-laden vegetation about me had no benign influence on my mood. Returning home, disgusted with *ennui*, I sought my chamber and threw myself upon a sofa in the hope of losing myself in sleep.

During my absence a note had arrived from my much esteemed friend Lady Herberts (an acquaintance of long standing) inviting me to attend a professional reception at her house in Kensington, that evening. Half reluctantly—in spite of my great friendship for Lady Herberts—I scrawled an acceptance, expecting to be bored as usual; for I hated the general run of society receptions. However, the word "professional" persuaded me to accept. I knew my friend to be a *connoisseur* in music and the dramatic art; also that she possessed many professional acquaintances. Thinking it over I came to the conclusion that after all I might be able to—foolishly I acknowledge—hide myself in a corner and listen unmolested to some *morceau* upon the violin or piano, and perhaps a recitation given by the leading actress of the day.

* * * * * * *

As I entered Lady Herberts' drawing-room Tito was at the piano. The delicious music, the perfume of huge roses, bunched here and there about the rooms and halls, had their influence upon me. My foot had no sooner sunk into the velvet carpet of the stairway than I inwardly rejoiced at having "accepted."

As I came through the hallway the apartments above seemed filled with rippling melody. Even then I noticed the exquisite touch of the performer. At first I thought he was playing something of Chopin, but I afterwards learned it was Salvi's own composition. My musical knowledge intuitively told me that the work bespoke great talent, but it was not till I had heard my new friend sing a *romanza*, his own composition, that I realized how true an artist he was.

Lady Herberts did not greet me till after he had finished and had come towards us.

Then followed the introduction and the making of that acquaintance, which in the years to come was to be so much to us both. It has often been said that in one's features we may read the distinguishing characteristics of one's nature and the principles underlying the current of one's life. Be this as it may, as I looked for the first time into the eyes of Tito Salvi, as I grasped for the first time his hand, I knew that his career would be a remarkable one—that his end would be unusual. Physically he was the most prepossessing man I had ever seen. Not tall, but slightly above the medium height, and not muscularly, but proportionally built. His splendid personality which after all was his chief attraction, shone from his eyes, in his smile, and graced every gesture.

As years rolled by I found that my first impressions of him did not change, but on the contrary, took deeper root.

After that first meeting Fate seemed to favour our acquaintance and friendship. We met often at the houses of friends. Our first conversations were in regard to music. I remember

with what surprise I listened to the remarks and worthy sentiments he expressed. He had been no idler in his profession, but a conscientious worker, striving day after day for new truths in the world of his art. His soul seemed filled with music, yet he was no dreamer. But in using that word I do not refer to those moods which all great artists know and feel, when the earth seems to slip from under their feet and even the devices of their hearts become aspirations lifting them as it were into the clouds; for this is not impracticable. It is at moments such as these when the genius draws his inspiration from the Heavens, and gains that which when applied to mental labour, gives him and his work the unmistakable ring which renders success inevitable and causes men to worship the great artist in his work.

Such an artist was Tito Salvi. Music to him was not a pastime, an amusement to be struggled for only as a pleasure. But the life he led was the seeking in sincerity for the golden nugget of truth amid the dross and charlatanism of the world—an ennobling of one's nature for the beauty of the art he loves.

We were, as the Italians say, "*simpatico*" in the broad sense of the word. We understood each other from the first. Salvi's mind was a mirror reflecting my own aspirations, almost my thoughts. It is seldom, yes, too seldom, I fear, that individuals of keen sensibilities and strong characteristics, meet harmoniously in this life. It is the exception and not the rule. Human affection should be a thing akin to love, but deeper in its significance for the welfare of the individual. There is no jealousy in true friendship. No lusting for the things that should not be; not so much a desire to hold and possess as to comprehend, to feel the nature one of the other, each helping each, each blessing each, while irradiations of the finest sort start from within and vibrate through both lives, till the thought, impulse and action of the one becomes in sympathy the thought, impulse and action of the other.

Such a friendship as this becomes at once intellectual, high and absorbing. Every ability a man possesses is enhanced by the direct or indirect sympathy of his friend. No artist sees the lines and pencillings of nature in a truer light than when his heart throbs with the consciousness that his friend sympathetically appreciates his aspirations. A friend's life within a friend's life is oft-times the fruition of man's labour.

So Tito Salvi and I were friends. Gradually the awakening of sympathetic relations unfolded to us each other's nature, till every act became spontaneous, every friendly desire understood almost as soon as felt. I became a conscious impetus in his work; for me to listen while he played was to fill the atmosphere of the place with a sort of inspiration. Days, weeks, months rolled by, but we did not grow weary of each other's society. A few days spent in his company was an intellectual feast and a mental rest to me at the same time. His music suggested thoughts and subjects to be worked out by my pen. Once more there was pleasure in my work. A letter from him, coming when I was at my desk alone, would gild the tip of my pen with a brilliancy that seemed to illuminate the page on which I wrote. How much then did we become to each other! Anything, everything, invaluable.

So, reader, you will see that Tito Salvi was a valiant power in my life. Not an acquaintance of unusual warmth, to be forgotten when out of sight; but a brother, an influence, which had become a part of myself. So even when his form and features were so horribly lost to me, when I saw him no more—still he was not afar off. Even yet I can feel the sympathetic subtleties of his broad, lovable, magnanimous nature.

But there is such a thing as too close an intimacy which robs while it gives. There is something in the near communication of two individuals, being magnetic and intellectually companions, that often becomes unsafe because it exhausts its own power. Few men are strong enough to bear all the exigencies

of intimate relationship. That there are exceptions I do not doubt. There are times when even the weaknesses of such a friend seem to us virtues; perhaps it is because we compare them unconsciously with our own recognized shortcomings. Tito Salvi understood himself in these things, and he was strong. Indeed sometimes when we were enjoying the mutual sympathy of our intimate friendship the most, he would turn to me and say, "Paul, this confinement and overwork is killing me; my strength is insufficient to bear it. To-morrow I will take a run into the country for a week—to the sea-shore for a few days," or, as the case might be, "I will visit friends in Paris." I never failed to understand him at these times. He always went as he proposed. And when we met again, work was accomplished with greatly increased speed and enthusiasm.

Tito was a man of the strongest principles and character, but not strong physically or mentally. His ardent, nervous, artistic temperament was too powerfully absorbing for his mind and physique; so many times I became concerned for him as I would have for a brother. His pale face, thin lips, and the tired expression in his eyes, which I often noticed after he had spent hours at composition, used to fill me with apprehension, and cause me to wonder if after all he could endure the life of labour he had planned for himself. But as time went on he became firmer and more settled in his health, mentally and physically.

III.

How long I remained in the mesmeric state I cannot tell, and what took place during that time is equally unintelligible to me. When the waking came, my first sensations were of weakness and exhaustion, and I was inclined mentally to doubt

the reality of my condition and surroundings. I tried to concentrate my thoughts enough to realize whether I was not the victim of a nightmare. I laughed—mechanically I suppose—for I sensed nothing ludicrous or mirthful in my situation, waking or dreaming. My eyes on opening encountered darkness, but soon faint glimmers came to them from the gas jets. Gradually, like the growing light of early dawn, as my senses returned, I remembered under what circumstances I had become unconscious. Once more I could feel the steady hard grasp upon my arm, and the burning gaze bent upon me which deprived reason of its right; the same as when some horrible reptile charms its prey before destruction.

When my eyes had felt the light, I turned my head slowly. Then a sensation of pain came to my limbs and I found myself sitting upright in a chair; one movement only was necessary to prove I was bound to it. One by one as letters follow in the alphabet I became conscious of my state.

Iron cuffs cut into my wrists. Soon I felt stout cords binding my limbs and feet. But appalling as the situation was, it did not prevent my knowing that I had something far worse to contend with than these physical bonds. It was the fearful knowledge of the damning power, which one or all of these men possessed to fetter and paralyze my soul, that hung about me; had my limbs and arms been free; had I a thousand weapons at my command they would have been worse than useless, since the force to use them had been taken from my brain. In the grasp of these men I was as helpless as an infant.

I could hear soft voices communicating behind me in Italian. Occasionally my name was repeated, but no one spoke to me. I cannot now say why I did not cry out; it may have been the fear of instant death kept me silent. When we are helpless we have the timidity of babes. I do not think even the idea of speaking occurred to me for some minutes.

At last my mind grasped upon a thought, almost the first intelligible action of my brain after my irresponsible sleep; a thought, so powerful in its nervous influence upon me that my brain filled suddenly with blood, so heated, it seemed as if the very roots of my hair would burn; the muscles of my throat seemed to spasmodically close on respiration, while I gasped for a breath of relief. It was the remembrance of Tito Salvi and the thought that he was no more.

My own horrible situation, even in its magnitude did not seem to impress me much, or if at all, it was like the fitful shining of minute rays through a cloud.

Again I saw the vision of his dead body before my eyes; again the white face turned upwards towards my own, till I felt the eyes were open and beseeching me in dumb eloquence to avenge him. This mental picture conjured by my brain filled me with fresh horror fraught with a sort of maddening joy that *I too might kill.* The description of that element of joy within me is beyond my powers. My animated soul seemed fired into new life and transported for the moment into ecstasy cried out "Life, life! Just God, if this be true and Tito has become the victim of a crime, spare me but a day, a week, a year of life, full life that I may know the truth, hunt out the murderer of my friend, and then kill him, ay, a thousand times kill him with my own hand."

The desire growing to a hope became a prayer. The intensity of my being filled my soul with the answer to that prayer—that I should not die, that for a day, a week, or a year, my limbs and powers would be as free as the wings of a bird in the farthest azure of the sky. I knew one day I should escape from the mesmeric power of devils or of men, and wreak a revenge that would be sweeter than a draught to the dying, ay, sweeter than life itself!

They had seated me before a table upon which were many bottles, and an open leather toilet case. At a glance I sup-

posed it to contain vials filled with drugs, dies and cosmetics I wondered in what utility these things could be applied to me, but I had not long to wait for information.

When I had shown signs of consciousness, two of the three men (the third remained near the door) came towards me, and without a word one of them prepared to use the contents of the vials. What a moment it was as those men neared me! I do not think I experienced fear on seeing them approach, although I believed I was in the company of devils in human shape, but I remained calm, helplessly calm. Instinctively I made a slight effort to rise in spite of my bonds. My helplessness grew to acute pain. I glanced into the eyes of one of the two men as he approached. It was the face I had seen in the doorway at the station. He returned my glance by dropping his eyes significantly to my handcuffed wrists. A smile broke over his features, but it was not so cruel nor so devilish as I might have expected. I could remain silent no longer. Their silence seemed to add to the weight upon me.

"Were you men," I said, doggedly, "you would have let me remain unbound, and I would have done my best to have killed you in open fight, odds against odds, but being murderers, vile demons or worse, you have bound me body and soul. 'Twill be an easy work now to finish your amusement."

The sound of my voice gave me a sense of relief, but neither of the individuals paid much heed to my words. At length the man nearest to me, who was now standing in front of me beside the table, spoke in Italian, a language as familiar to me as my own.

"It is not our intention to harm you, signore, though you may rightly have some fear. Still, we have to-night's work to do. You think some crime has been committed, perhaps murder; you see I read your thoughts. Perhaps you had a hand in it—we shall see."

Reader, I wish you could have heard the tone of that man's voice as he uttered those words, and seen the expression of his face.

"However," he continued, every word making me burn with rage and dismay, "if a crime, undoubtedly it was inevitable; possibly it was done for another. Be calm, do as we bid you, and we will answer for the safety of your life. Make no effort to escape; it might, in spite of our good wishes, cause your death."

He spoke with the accent and breeding of a gentleman. His full, dark, handsome face was in no way disguised. I was astonished at his assurance under such circumstances. What deeds, evil or high, was he not capable of doing! I knew by a certain unfathomable expression of the eye, it was he who had the mesmeric power, therefore the most of all to be feared.

"Escape!" I cried in derision. "Escape is a good word to use when you have deprived a man of the use of limb or muscle, and fettered his consciousness with a power that only belongs to the devil. I know without the telling which is master."

"He speaks as if Italian blood ran in his veins," said the man near the door, in a whisper.

"*Andiamo!* we are losing time," returned the one at the table, without making other reply to his friend. "To work, *signori!*"

A shiver ran through me when he spoke, in spite of his previous encouraging words, for I knew not what their "work" might be. What could they intend to do with me! I was partially unbound. Perhaps they had some mysterious design against me in connection with the murder of my friend, if they had aught to do with it.

The mesmerist turned to the toilet-case, took therefrom a pair of clipping shears, a razor, one or two bottles of dye, and prepared to change my physiognomy and personal

appearance to suit himself. And what a metamorphosis he wrought, as lock by lock my brown hair fell to the ground! My eyebrows became black as coal, and my chin and lip as cleanly shaven as a youth's. I was no longer myself. No one for a moment could have suspected my identity; detection would have been impossible. My new, mesmeric friend was an artist in his peculiar line, and I took almost a humorous pleasure, as he did interest in his work, while I watched each expression and feature of my face change under his brush and pencil. So delicately to truth did he draw each line and pencil each shadow, that veritable disease seemed to linger in my hollow cheeks and sunken eyes; in fact, all the wreck wrought by a wasting fever was stamped upon my countenance.

The greatest surprise to me was that my features became as characteristically Italian as those of the men about me. It was all done by a process of enamelling.

Not once did the artist speak till his work was finished; then with a smile he exclaimed, throwing down his brush,—"*Dio in Cielo* could not recognize his handiwork now."

The next thing I was commanded to undress hastily. I obeyed each order as if my life depended upon it. A complete monk's suit was brought to me from the inner room. This costume consisting of underclothing of fine quality and unlike any I had ever seen. Then followed the heavy black cowl bound at the waist with knotted white cord: then the cap, white hose and sandals. I looked indeed a veritable Florentine monk.

"My art is the only thing that can save you," remarked the artist as he helped me dress. "You may think us far worse than we are; do you not know what your fate would have been should the clues and evidence we hold against you be known?"

Clues, evidence against me! I sickened and grew pale under my paint at the very thought his words suggested. This man

must certainly imagine I knew nothing of the mystery he was palling about me. What could he know of the presentiment which, combined with his words, enhanced the appalling dread of learning more! What of Tito's letter which I had only read in part! Had he read it also?

"Heaven!" I cried, "what devilish plot is this; why have you tracked an innocent man, throwing an atmosphere of suspicion about him that would convict a saint? Tell me all, let me know the worst at once."

"That is right, keep your kerchief from your eyes; if you are not a fool you will realize the situation." The mesmerist placed a heavy hand upon my shoulder and continued: "We began amicably; let us continue. I am a stranger to you; the peculiarities of my nature you do not know; study them well. What I say to you is good advice for we shall yet travel together, and I trust be companionable. I shall be considerate toward you for your true position is known only to me. There is no reason that you should not smile contentedly, appreciatively, beneath your mask. The situation is not so bad; when once you learn the setting of the scene you will find secret exits to use at will."

The expression of his face changed and showed plainly some deeper thought possessed his mind, as the shadow of a cloud may rest deeply beneath the surface ripple of a lake. There was a peculiar influence about him which thrilled a listener almost making him cry out with nervous pain. Yet I noticed all his strange powers and the strong emotions which he undoubtedly possessed seemed violently held in check. At the same time my mind became rested and found a sort of soothing sensation in contemplating his own. I felt to grasp his hand would be sustaining. It perhaps may seem unnatural, considering the circumstances, but with the overwhelming dread which the night had brought; in the uncertainty lining the roadway of my future steps; in my abject ignorance of the

fate which lay before me, I feared lest this man should leave my side, I dreaded the blank that would intervene did he remain speechless and departing from this mystery leave it blacker and more exasperating.

"I cannot understand," I began falteringly, "yet I know I am your victim, and one about whom you may have wound a chain of evidence that would make a world believe me guilty of whatever crime you wish."

He roused suddenly and looked me full in the face. "You were his friend," he said, "and truly no Italian blood ever ran in worthier veins, nor did I ever know a nobler man than Tito Salvi!"

I became almost unmanned at this sudden speaking of my friend's name. I grasped the mesmerist's hand and whispered vehemently: "Heaven knows the truth of what you say; you have fired me into an agony of apprehension and suspense. Tito Salvi! I dreamt of him to-night, tell me something, tell me what you know of him!"

The rattling of the window sash and a swash of rain against the pane came like demon voices warning him to answer my appeal by a silent look; and so he did, while my face fell on to my arm, my prayer for hope died upon my lips. In vain I tried to hide distracting visions from haunting my sight.

"It is useless," I gasped with burning breath, "you are right, come what may I am at your mercy; the innocence of a helpless man is absurd in the eyes of law and of men. You alone know your own plot, it must be a tale of your own telling. Surely you will leave no stone unturned, or a false thread in the weaving of your designs."

I was speaking more to myself than to the man before me, and my words suggested new thoughts; new emotions awoke within me. I threw off, as best I could, my attitude of dejection, a smile straightened the bitter curl of my lips. "You are my friend," I said, insinuatingly. "You have hid me from the

light of day, from the latent consequence of any desperate act. You have cloaked my personality with the robe of piety and melted my features into those of another man."

My assurance seemed to both please and annoy him. Some uncontrollable sense of limited power began to creep into his heart's blood and brain. With a movement, all impulsive, he leaned towards me and hissed rather than spoke in my ear: "Do not forget your presentiment; no cup of poisoned wine is more pregnant with evil than the air which you now breathe. At this moment were I to sting your ear with one word of naked truth you would crawl from here trembling in every limb, fright and horror greater than that of your presentiment would chill and congeal your blood; yet," he added, with wonderful change, "I am, as you say truly, your friend."

In spite of his words I was composed. My weaponless disguise was indeed a protection. I felt as if Paul Castleton had fled the world. I saw myself as if I were looking at another individual. He seemed pale and frightened, while my features wore an expression of sanctimonious calm. He saw visions of a trial for murder; bench, jurymen, and judge, and the gallows towering in the background with noose and trap. I was being protected. He stood naked in the noonday, the world seeking him out. I was hidden behind the features of another man. He was clutching at every straw, death and Tito Salvi staring him in the face.

"Does it not strike you that our talk is idle—worse than useless, when your words breathe mystery and every sentence is an unanswerable question? I can stand it no longer; take me away from this vision-haunted chamber. Let us make haste, the night is gone, I desire to know the worst."

As I spoke I determined to proceed cautiously, yet with seeming confidence. Circumstance alone must be my aid. My knowledge of human nature igniting with natural tact produced a fire of almost complacent confidence. It was

with eagerness now I wished the end to come, be it what it might.

"Be patient," replied the mesmerist, and he turned to the two men who had remained perfectly silent during our conversation. His eye fell upon the letter which had fallen to the floor from my hand before I had finished reading it. He picked it up, glanced his eye over it, and it appeared to me, showed considerable emotion as he did so. Without turning the first page evidently having read all he desired, he folded it and placed it in his inside pocket. For the first time his manner was restrained. Powerful he was, master of the situation undoubtedly; why then did his face suddenly pale and an attitude of momentary weakness come over him? I sprang to my feet with an inclination, even in my half-bound condition, to fall upon him and demand an explanation of his unwarranted conduct. At the moment he swerved towards me, and accompanying his words with a polite bow, said:

"Pardon me, *signore*." I sat down. He slowly walked to my trunk.

"Pardon me, *signore*," he repeated. "It is necessary to my pleasure and your safety that I examine your trunk; it may contain something which if brought to daylight might bear compromisingly upon our case."

I realized some new step was about to be carried out. That this strange and confident man knew more about the contents of my trunk than I knew myself I had every reason to believe. A few articles of clothing were taken from it, and while I looked, wondering what frightful object or clue would next be produced, the mesmerist waved his hand, and one of his companions extinguished the light. We were in total darkness, save for a few ghostly rays piercing the window from a street lamp. What had they found not meant for my eyes to see? I tried to penetrate the darkness, but vainly. I could descry nothing but the outline of the mesmerist's figure crouching over

the trunk. How false and useless my conjectures ; how misleading every act of these men, who played so well a part before my very eyes, I was ignorant of their simplest act. For a time I was ignored by them. Frequently the rain and moaning of the wind, or rattling of the window-frame, caused me to shudder with fear, thinking a tap had sounded on the door, and that in a space of drawing a breath we possibly might be discovered in the act of accomplishing some weird, unimaginable crime.

The light was renewed as suddenly as it had been extinguished, then all was quiet, and I saw the mesmerist had returned to the trunk all the clothing and effects which had been taken from it.

There seemed naught for me to do but study these new acquaintances. I noticed that their movements, language and bearing bespoke them to be gentlemen of culture and refinement, undoubtedly belonging to a high and refined Italian class. It did not seem possible they could be guilty of murder. I could not make up my mind they were responsible for the death of Tito Salvi, should the morrow prove beyond all doubting the truth of my presentiment and his—that he was no more. Every moment the affair became a greater mystery. Conclusive thought seemed to lose its tension, and my head whirled and swam painfully. With a desperate effort I fought for consciousness ; by force of will I sent the blood from my head to my chilled hands and feet, yet the figures about me became blurred, almost intangible. There was something nauseating in the air I breathed ; a sickening odour filled the room ; a flash of light, almost blinding in its brilliancy, blazed near the mesmerist, for a second only, and was gone. What could it mean ? Was I being suffocated ? Mingled odours of sulphur and acid filled my tongue with poisoning taste. I could stand no longer without aid ; I reeled, and, half unconscious, fell to the floor.

"Give me something to drink," I gasped. "My throat is burning, I can bear this horror no longer."

One of the men, I believe, quickly responded to my call, and I drank a draught of their own concoction which seemed to give me new life. The man then cut the cords, partially binding my limbs, but it was some moments before I could rise.

"The beginning of the end has come," said the mesmerist, in a hoarse whisper. His face had become deadly pale. I was helped to my feet. Haste now marked every moment of these strange men. The mesmerist took a sheet of paper from the case of vials, and, having opened an ink bottle, placed a pen in my hand. A light as from hell shone in his eye, fixed on mine, and then my mind and will became his own; it was the work of only a second or two to will me to sign my name to a few lines upon the paper.

As if in a dream I took the pen, as if in a dream I scrawled my name, semi-conscious that it could prove my death warrant. I felt as if cased in ice to melt which I must succumb to his desires. I did not even read what I had signed.

I had but just dropped the pen, when a hurried tap was heard on the door. The damning jailer of my soul was so startled by the sound, he instantly took his eyes from me—the power had gone. I became myself again, but the paper had been taken from the table. I put out my hand to grasp it but it had disappeared. We all stood breathless. The door opened and an apparition as beautiful, as heavenly and serene as the previous ones were frightful, passed the threshold. It was the form of a woman, young and lovely beyond comparison. She started to advance hurriedly a few steps, then stood like one petrified. The mesmerist with a glance had enchained her soul. My lips parted in ecstasy, my eyes contemplating her loveliness as a darkened being doth thirst for light. Soon the woman slowly advanced pre-occupied, ethereal as one walks in sleep. She took the pen from where I had dropped it and upon the paper, now restored to the table, under sign of "witness," wrote: "Eugenia Salvi."

I stood dumbfounded. No monk's garb or painted face

could save me now. If what I had seen with my own eyes, and what I had taken part in were but the details of some villianous plot, how deep must its foundations have been sunk! "I am lost! lost!!" rang in my brain, and I watched the face of that lovely woman, who seemed no less a vision than the ghost of Tito.

She did not seem to notice me. As if in a reverie she sank into a chair and leaning forward looked at the floor and smiled responsively to some fancy, some hallucination of the mesmerist's influence. The picture of this woman coming before me in that ethereal atmosphere and light, subtle yet all a vision, stealing upon my consciousness within a chamber of mystery and dread, impressed me strangely. In a draught of poison there is pleasure, be it but sweet. So on my burdened spirit her gentle influence breathed serenity. Her wonderful beauty enthralled me; devotion, desire enraptured was my jailer now. "Tito's sister," I whispered inwardly. There was a marvellous resemblance about the eyes and forehead. Often, oh, how often I had heard him speak of his beautiful sister; till now I had never seen her.

The end had come. The mesmerist gathered together the contents of his case saying, "Now we will be off." Indeed it was an easy matter to quit the house, their bill, perhaps mine also being previously paid. I believe we were the only occupants who had not retired. One by one we softly withdrew from the room. I being in a manner led by the mesmerist down the stairs, without making a sound loud enough to wake any one. Then into the street where a few doors down we found a carriage in waiting. I was commanded to enter it. I turned to look for the beautiful woman, but she had disappeared also the mesmerist's confederates. At a glance I saw I was alone with him. I said nothing, showed neither interest nor surprise. I stepped into the vehicle. The mesmerist took his seat beside me and gave the order, "Drive to Charing Cross Station."

IV.

OUR destination, as I soon learned, was Florence, Italy—the country from which I had returned only a few hours before. I will not weary the reader with a detailed description of that monotonous journey, so devoid was it of incident. We were two days in making it. Most of my time was spent in weaving plans for the future, wondering to what extent circumstances would aid me.

My new friend, the mesmerist, volunteered no information in regard to our movements, nor could I obtain any by inquiry. Soon after leaving London I grew bold enough to call him by name, which in the future I shall use in speaking of him—as the reader knows it was Coracio. In any other circumstances he would have been a pleasant companion, being intellectual and, in a measure, æsthetic. I say this as I remember him after eight years. At the time I was so bewildered, so burdened with grief at the loss of my friend, for I no longer doubted his death, that I took little heed of his company or of aught about me.

It was already late at night when we arrived at Milan. The air was chilly, and a thick fog hid the Cathedral as we passed through the *Piazza* to an hotel.

"We will go on to-morrow," said Coracio. "I am tired out with excitement and fatigue." I saw black lines under his eyes, but his strong physique belied his words. He showed a nervousness I had not seen in his manner before. He talked but little, then his sentences were detached and exclamatory. Since we had left London I had seen no demonstration of his occult power.

I was startled one evening while we were on the train, having a compartment to ourselves, by this inquiry,—

"Do I look like a villain?" In spite of a faint smile about his lips I could see he was fearfully in earnest.

"Do I look like a villain?" he repeated, and searched my

face as if for an answer. I did not reply immediately, but studied his physiognomy. His face was strongly but delicately moulded, passionate, melancholy, yet brilliántly handsome Sometimes I thought I detected a resemblance in his features to those of poor Tito. I had always been in the habit of studying character from the face; this man's baffled me. His forehead was too high, too even, to denote murder or villainy of any sort. His head so shapely, so intellectual, belied the seeming possibility of his present situation. Still an expression about the mouth which I noticed sometimes when he was in repose, betrayed the weakness of his nature—it was unfathomable, merely suggestive.

"A man as worldly-wise and clever as you are need not show his heart in his face," was my reply. "If you are no villain, why should you look like one? A prince in a herdsman's garb is no less a prince; an honest man may assume a robber's stealth if he like—what matter how you look?"

"There is a meaning your words hide, rather than convey. What is it?"

"My words can have no other significance to you than what in them appeals to you. I fear you are fully as wise a man Coracio, as you look."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean you have a double nature; neither of which do I understand as yet. You possess esoteric forces a child might better command than do you. You are a man, Coracio, who could kill the very thing you would befriend. Were you two men instead of one, these two men would be mortal enemies. You are not a man I would quickly accuse of crime."

"Do not speak of crime and of killing," he said, in an agitated tone. "My hands have never been stained with blood."

I remembered that on the vision of poor Tito's lifeless form there had been no stain of blood, no mark, no scar, nothing but the physiognomy of sleep.

Coracio's thoughts annoyed him, perceptibly. "There was no stain," he said, in a whisper, covering his face with his hands. Then he relapsed into silence till I thought he would not mention the painful subject again. But I was mistaken.

"Before this work is finished, and you have completed your part, we must grow into a mutual confidence. It is true you have been made a victim of a strange plot (there are no witnesses here to appreciate the acknowledgment) but you must remember had I left you in London as I found you, your trunk containing evidence against you undreamt of, nothing could have saved your neck from the halter. That is what I have done, or rather tried to do. My art, my good will have endeavoured to befriend you: surely that is something in my favour, is it not? I have much more to do, for your sake as well as my own safety. We must work together; your course must be to plot with me, not against me, and there will be much for you to do. If you are wise you will take my advice. If you are foolhardy the result will be upon your own head."

He paused. What sensible reply could I make?

"I am in your power now as much as at the first; until I am out of it I can do little else but obey you."

"Don't be churlish! You are not in my power: our power must be one."

"Go on, you have but begun."

"You are an honourable man. I see your eye is true. More than this, you understand the Italian life, but little of Italian villainy."

How unreservedly did this man speak of murder. "O, God!" I cried, silently, "is it true then, the worst is to be realized, and poor Tito is outdone and sacrificed!"

"Yet who tells you in my tongue or your own that if safety lies in dishonour, it is not sweeter than destruction. Perhaps you will take the risk; perhaps circumstances and danger will deal in sympathy till your nature recoils from itself and you

know it no more. A trial in a court of justice might be your death. Your temperament is too sensitive, your grace too finely wrought to bear it. To be held unconvicted of murder would kill you. What part I shall play in such a case will depend largely upon yourself. Make an enemy of me and you are lost. You know one does not begin work of this kind without designedly planning the end. My advice would be, escape even the shadow of the law. Do not attempt to stand trial."

Plainly as he spoke, intelligently as he fixed his eyes upon me, I could not entirely follow him. Coracio was one of those men who possess such immense powers of personal magnetism, that the mind of a listener is for a time partially lost. While listening to such men we understand them more by intuition than from the import of their words.

"*Per Dio!*" he presently burst forth, "You seem a man of fibre and determination; perhaps even I should fear you as an enemy."

"And why should I be your enemy?" I offered. "I am an enemy only to the brute who has wronged my friend."

Coracio scanned my features thoughtfully, perhaps to learn from them more than by aught I might say—something of my inner thoughts.

"Something other than your words impresses me with the idea that in this strange affair you are not the guilty one, though perhaps I wrong some other man in saying it. But why continue this milk-and-water parlance longer? Your occult power, even, cannot long keep the truth from me. As you believe implicitly in your own strength, so respect those traits in others which can lead to any act. As an enemy I might——"

"To interrupt you," interpolated Coracio, "are you sure this could not be proven a case of suicide?" He asked this question in a slow, deliberate manner—cutting each word clearly as he spoke, as if wishing each to have its due effect and weight upon my imagination.

"Suicide!" I responded, "I am not aware how intimately you have known Tito Salvi, but did you understand his character as I do, you would feel yourself a fool for asking the question. Suicide! he was far too noble a man to be driven to self-destruction by any misery save insanity."

"I believe there is a taint of that very kind in the family blood," quietly remarked Coracio, pretending to fix his eyes upon the floor, but as I could plainly see, in spite of his bending posture, his gaze was full upon my face, from under his long lashes.

"I know nothing of the secrets of his family," I answered wishing for the first time in my life that Tito had confided more to me in regard to his near relatives.

"You did not know them well, then?"

"I did not know them at all; Tito once told me in part the circumstances of his father's death, and that his mother had died also. I did not desire to know more. I never saw them nor his beautiful sister, of whom he used often to speak. It may seem strange, that being as near to him as I have been for the past five years, I know absolutely nothing of his family."

"It is often so, family secrets are best kept from friends by keeping apart from the homes of each, but in this case perhaps there was not so much to be known."

What had I cared for the secrets of Tito's family? What was it to me, if for reasons he would not state, he never invited me to join him in his home? I knew during the past five years his visits had been short, few, and far between. Ah! what a regret filled my soul as I realized how little I knew. Implacable justice might come in time, but what speedy wings of truth could I not lend her did I possess full knowledge of my friend's family life and secret, of Coracio's influence in their midst, and the cause of this blow at which Tito's letter hinted. But regret was useless; quietly, without one rash act I had to follow whither Coracio led, and gather as best I might from his words and

looks, from the people I met, from the circumstances which came to my experience. I must learn all or nothing. So, little was left me but to nurse patience humbly. To pose with friendly bearing towards Coracio and dream in wakefulness, zealously watching for some impolitic act, some carelessly uttered word which would disclose the inner thought of this man's motives and designs. For the present we were fellow travellers, that was enough. Perhaps in time I might become a neophyte to his occult accomplishments.

"You are right, Coracio, we will not be enemies," I said, in an assuring tone.

"Interested alike in the same cause, as friends we must ferret out if possible a happy result together—being sworn not to render each other liable to justice, were either suspected."

"I make no compact," I quickly replied. "We must know the nature of a seed before we sow it. The night is still too dark and mysterious for me to anticipate the dawn. When I am no longer in the dark and do not doubt the reality of what has happened, I will plot and work in sympathy or out of sympathy with you as occasion may demand. Say no more on this subject; if we continue in this strain, understanding each other so little, one of us will make some error, will drop some careless word. To quarrel at such a moment would be fatal to one of us. I am half mad with anguish and horror at my friend's fate. I would make any sacrifice to undo this horrid work, or to avenge him. I cannot reason yet. If you are not guilty, and have had no hand in this crime, I must wait till circumstance and opportunity force you to prove it."

Coracio understood me. He folded his hands across his lap, closed his eyes, and said, for what purpose I know not: "We must at all events be friends, you are too noble a man to be an enemy of mine. Yours is a sympathetic, Italian nature; I can appreciate it, let us be friends." He put out his hand—his eyes still closed—and I received his grasp heartily.

This ended our conversation for the present, and little more was said during our journey regarding our respective positions. No conversation could bring about a satisfactory understanding. Many a moment during that journey I felt tempted to fall suddenly upon the man who had been my voluntary companion in this affair, and kill him, so thirsty did my soul become for revenge. But I thank God the work was not for my hands to do—the hour had not yet come. No cry of revenge could have then loosened my arm to commit such a crime, for a certain obligation to the man who had defended me, negatively it is true, but nevertheless defended me, cooled my blood and changed my emotions from a passionate hatred of the murderer of Tito Salvi, to a sad, affectionate remembrance of the lost friend.

At the Italian frontier I had provided myself with a quantity of copper coins, for my priestly garb rendered me a target to the poor wretches seeking charity. Italy is full of beggars, many blind and maimed, but the average Italian of the better class has little sympathy for them. However, I do not regret the *soldi* I threw to the waiting crowd of paupers about the stations on our way. They returned a respectful salutation, sometimes they would kiss my robe. Tito had taught me charity in small things and I gave spontaneously. I never saw him refuse a beggar in my life. It seemed a strange part I was playing. Had I stepped upon a stage before a critical audience I could not have felt more ill at ease. Still my disguise was a protection and events might yet come to pass which would make me glad to hide behind Coracio's painted mask.

Coracio did not seem afraid of losing me. I think he felt my own interest in the affair would lead me on in his company, in the hope of gaining valuable information, or at least till I had learned all I could from him. I did not doubt that the taking of me to Italy was all a part of the plot, but I was not fettered again, nor even a suspicious eye kept upon me.

That night in Milan I could not sleep. We retired early; I heard a clock outside, probably in some church tower, strike eleven; then I grew restless, got up, dressed, and in spite of the damp, foggy night, went out into the street, thence to the Cathedral square. Having reached the entrance of the *galleria* which faces the façade of the *duomo* at right angles, I stood awhile beneath that beautiful arch erected to the memory of Vittorio Emanuelle. We were to go to Florence on the morrow, the city where I had last seen Tito alive. I knew the place well. I tried to remember some one on whom I might rely, in case things worked against me, but no name presented itself to my memory. The friends I had known would doubtless dislike to be mixed up in such an affair; they would gossip about it; yes, and revel in its mystery, mourn in a superficial way the memory of their fellow countryman and the friend they had understood so little. Ah! well I knew they would find the circumstances of his death too mysterious to come near home to them. I counted little or not at all on having any help from friends in Florence.

When once there, however, I believed I could by tact and patience draw something from Coracio that would give me a clue to work upon. As he had said, we could work together. He had nothing to fear from me if he had no hand in dealing the blow which had killed my friend. You must remember I could form no idea of what part these three men, Coracio and his companions—whose names I did not even know—had previously played in the case. Were they victims as well as myself? I had not a thread to suggest even what the motive of the crime had been; if, indeed, a crime had been committed.

Gradually the mist cleared away, and the moon began to illuminate with feeble rays the marble minarets and statues of the cathedral. The air became cooler but clearer and I felt less oppressed as the dampness left the atmosphere. I

fell to thinking of Eugenia Salvi, Tito's sister, and was sorry now that I had never known her. Although I had seen her but once, I could not forget her grace and beauty. Strange she should have been left in London. What part could she have to play in this weird drama? I hardly dared guess, but a victim I thought her—a victim like myself. We were all victims, but of whom? Who and what represented the central force in this matter? Who was the powerful unit which bade us all do his will without a murmur?

I always had a habit when annoyed and perplexed of walking late at night. Many a plot in fiction I have worked out satisfactorily beneath the moon's rays as I walked alone. Night, the friend of devils and angels alike, lends a soothing influence to the most fiendish deeds, and sublimest imaginings. Many a murderer has dared to do at night what his brain plotted, yet shrank from in the day-time. Night is the hour when every timid lover forgets his embarrassment and fear, and gains assurance not known to him in the day. I watched the Cathedral façade till the statues had taken shape in the uncertain light, then turned my back upon the *piazza* and took a stroll through the arched and crystal-roofed *galleria.* The *cafés* were still open and a throng of loiterers and pleasure-seekers of both sexes were surging in and out, chatting, laughing, and presenting a lively spectacle. Men and women of the world met in rendezvous beneath those arches, on errands of vice or amusement. Many a painted and dark eye dropped as it met mine, while my hands clasped the rosary at my side, and my lips moved as if in prayer. I saw no one clad in priestly garb, or even a churchman of any kind in a costume similar to my own. It is not habitual with those of the class I represented to haunt such places at night, so I attracted more attention than I probably should have done elsewhere.

Returning to the entrance arch I again faced the cathe-

dral, now bathed in a flood of soft light ; and stood some time reflecting. A carriage drove up to the entrance and stopped only a few feet away from me. I saw the occupant within making a gesture as if wishing me to approach. I did so. My priestly costume hindered the eyes of the suspicious from seeking to find in this meeting a lover's rendezvous. I opened the door of the carriage and nearly fell headlong into it as I beheld the living face of Eugenia Salvi.

One sign for me to join her was enough. I sat down beside her, took her hand and found her trembling violently.

"I knew your face," she commenced at once, "it has Coracio's work upon it. I am in sore distress ; some one must help me. Perhaps you are clever enough to guess of this in part, the rest I will tell you. I knew the plot as far as it concerned you some time ago, but could not communicate with you. Together, we might have saved my brother, but now it is all too late for that, we must save ourselves."

She motioned the driver to take us to the hotel where she was stopping, then fell back and wept passionately.

"But how did you come here, Signorina Salvi ?" I asked. "We left you in London and hurried on to Italy immediately ; this is our first stopping place."

"I know, I know," she said, "Coracio intended to leave me behind ; but I escaped Cordelli and Modenti and came on the same train with you. It was not difficult. I remained in my carriage, and was the last to make the changes at the stations. At all events, Coracio did not observe me. I dare not see him ; he would be enraged, and that fearful power he possesses I cannot withstand when in this nervous state—I have been so long his victim, one glance from him is enough and my brain reels. *Per Dio !* I am lost if he sees me to-night."

"But he will not see you," I replied, almost affectionately, so helpless did the poor girl seem. "He retired some hours ago ; do not agitate yourself unnecessarily."

"I engaged this carriage, and watched for a long time in front of your hotel, hoping to see you come out: at last you came, but I was unable to attract your attention till now."

I looked into her dark eyes, sad and tear-stained. "Ours is a common interest," I thought, "you his sister, I his friend." What might she not know of the crime, its motive and means! Perhaps was intimate with the murderer—perhaps she loved him. I do not know why that idea occurred to me at that time, but it absorbed my fancy, nevertheless.

"This is all so strange, I do not know what to say," I cried, "but give me time—time and opportunity, that is all I require to avenge your brother. By the Saints, my arm is heavy, and my heart not weak; this disguise of Coracio's may aid me against them."

"But revenge will not bring back my brother."

My pity for the girl became painful. Her tone was bitter indeed, as she hopelessly spoke of revenge. My own grief seemed cold beside hers. "We must forget that for a time, *signorina*, and you must bear it as best you may. For the present, our immediate actions will claim strict attention. Here little can be said, but as soon as possible you must tell me all you know. Confide implicitly in me, or I shall be helpless, groping in the dark."

"Yes, yes," she answered, in a half-startled way, "but there will be great danger to both of us, I fear."

"Leave that to me; as I loved your brother, I swear I will protect you."

How much this beautiful girl seemed like her lost brother, in manner as well as look; did she but possess a similar nature and mind she would indeed be to me worthy my care.

We reached the hotel. She drew her veil over her eyes as she said, "I have engaged a private *salon;* come with me there, my maid is my only companion."

We were saluted by the gentlemen standing about the

entrance and hall. I made a deep obeisance and passed on, following up the stairs to a small apartment on the second floor.

Eugenia's maid was anxiously awaiting her mistress, but she left the *salon* soon after we entered. I sat down, weighted with conflicting hopes and fears. The case was beginning to have a new interest for me.

"Now that you are here, I am confused," said the lady, taking a chair opposite me. "You know nothing of my relation to these men, *signore?*"

"Nothing, nor what they may have been to Tito, either——"

"That is strange," tapping her foot restlessly on the floor, as she looked down. "Of course there is much I must tell you, but I am afraid to confide all to you; yet there is still a greater mystery that even I do not know."

She paused a second or two, and pressed her hands, which looked cold and white, to her still whiter forehead, as if trying to collect her thoughts, or entreating memory to serve her.

"Yet we are still such strangers! Oh, had I only known you before, it would all have been different! Now, Tito, poor, poor Tito is dead, and the worst, which might have been avoided had I known you, has happened."

The tears trickled down her pale cheek; she did not heed them, but continued. "It is I who need help now, your disguise gives me confidence—still I dare not tell you all; we are still strangers—still strangers."

In my doubts and fears I gave her meaning a thousand channels in which to run—some thoughts her words suggested I dared not entertain, no, not for a day or an hour. What might she not know!

"A common cause should make us friends immediately," I volunteered. "You know I was your brother's nearest, truest friend, yet even I did not suspect he had an enemy. Tell me as much as it is possible of what you know at once."

I almost feared to hear all she might say. The fire in her eyes, bespeaking burning grief and suspense, burned into my very soul. So charming was she, I dared hardly listen to a disclosure which might so interest me in her behalf out of pity, if nothing more, that to lose my heart and reason would prove inevitable.

"Do you suspect any one, if so, whom?" The question brought her to her feet.

"*Suspect!*" she gasped, while her face grew deadlier than before. "Oh! would that it were only suspicion!" She knew then; the woman before me could name the murderer of her brother.

"Speak, woman," I cried, "do not keep this from me; tell me who, and where he is. I will go to him this very night, and——"

"No, no, no," she answered quickly, putting up her hand as if to stop my excited enthusiasm; "it would be your death—"

"What! you say this, and you are Tito's sister? *Dio!* woman! tell me at once: I do not fear death in a fair fight."

"I cannot, I cannot, to-night!" she answered in an agonized tone. "Time, time will disclose it all to you, but not now." She sat down again in a despairing manner, adding, "He is very near to me."

"Then you will not help me! You must be mad; you deserve a worse fate than his, if you protect the murderer. Remember ours is a common cause."

"Yes, yes, I know, but I have not the courage or strength to-night, let me think what is best to tell you."

Some appalling secret weighed upon her mind and made dumb her tongue. I pitied her, but the suspense she caused almost maddened me.

"Then it was not Coracio?" I whispered across to her, and held my breath while waiting for her answer. She seemed to debate with herself.

"No!" She barely pronounced the word.

"Pardon me, *signorina*, but I do not believe you; for the first time since we left London, I now suspect him. Your words are condemning him in my heart. *You love Coracio and dare not speak the truth!*"

I knew not what effect my words would have, but she looked into my eyes with a horrified, appealing expression, and clutched the arm of her chair as if about to faint.

"Do not say that, *signore*. You are wrong. It is to your honour and generosity I appeal. Do not, I pray of you, do not believe what you have said, or I am undone. You cannot understand. Were you to know all; were certain secrets made known to you to-night, your rashness would be your death. One word I might disclose perhaps would give you light; another, ruin both our hopes. Wait, wait till my mind is firm. Be politic, till I can reason calmly and tell you just enough to aid you and no more. Coracio! I love Coracio? I beg you not to believe it—let no word, no thought, or event convince you of it. I do not love Coracio."

She had scarcely finished speaking when a knock at the door startled us. In response to Eugenia's voice it was opened by a waiter who announced no less a personage than Signor Coracio himself. "*Dio!*" gasped the poor woman sinking back. I felt the hour had come to protect her. Coracio entered, made a low bow and covered his surprise at seeing me.

"The dove has flown South, the North was too cold, eh! for white feathers?"

The lady gained her self-possession at the sound of his voice, much to my surprise.

"*Caro mio*," she replied, "la Signorina Salvi is her own mistress."

"Bravely said, *carina*, you are right; *la signorina* shall be her own mistress."

How strange this parleying under such circumstances!

These two had a mutual understanding I could not fathom. She had confessed herself helpless in his power, yet had suddenly gained strength on seeing him and hearing his voice. It is a curious fact that one possessing the talent of hypnotism has his weak moments, when the peculiar power he has usually at command becomes a dead letter and deserts him, just as the strength of any other moral gift or talent ebbs and flows with the emotions. This was evidently one of Coracio's weak moments and the woman realized it on seeing him.

"Cordelli and Modenti are gentlemen, yet seemingly you did not enjoy their society," added the man lightly, then turning to me said:—"Why do you look at me like that, Castleton, do not forget we are friends; yes or no? or was I dreaming?"

I thought I was becoming a victim to a petty trick as well as a plot. Who could understand the strange attitude of these two? Yet I was not quite hopeless. Too much haste might retard me in bringing the culprit to justice, whoever he was, far or near. I must be patient; but who could sit complacently by, hear and watch each strange word and act of the principals in this drama? I vow, stronger men than I claim to be would have felt as exasperated as I did as I sat and listened to these two.

"Heaven help me!" I cried in my heart, "Tito's blood will be on my own head if I am not clever enough to outwit these scoundrels and avenge him."

Thoughts like these in any crisis make a weak man strong. To crawl back to England and resume my professional labours heartlessly would be impossible. Not only the sunshine, but the stiff breeze of the morning had been taken from my life. Each hour, each day and year my loss would become greater. Fool that I was to have ever set my heart on any treasure to bind me to it so that its loss was like tearing me asunder.

"But there is something more yet," Coracio went on; "this

fair lady is with us. It is necessary that we should all be friendly. We are no longer in England but under Italy's fair sky. We are safer here; Italy protects her countrymen. I could not sleep to-night: I heard you leave your room. I followed you, but not maliciously. So it was too cold for you in London (turning to Signorina Salvi), and you did not find Cordelli and Modenti congenial? But why did you not confide in me? A lady so fair should not travel alone."

What a change! I should not have known him as the same man I left at the hotel. Why this change? Why had he weakened? Why did he suppress his anger at seeing the lady with me? I could not understand it. Murderer I believed him to be, yet I half admired the actor who was playing in real life this devilish part before my very eyes.

Signorina Salvi became calm and composed. She understood his words better than I. "Talk on," she said, with a faint smile, "you are as helpless to-night as we were yesterday."

For a moment I could not find the meaning of her words. He helpless with that devilish power within him! I wondered why he had not mesmerized one or both of us long before this, and willed us to do some fearful deed designed for his own end or safety. A quick, sharp, painful expression came to his face, but it passed like a flash of lightning. More and more I became mystified. My time had not yet come; I must know more. Signorina Salvi must tell the truth. I threw off my manner of discomfort, embarrassment and annoyance, and once more began to feast my eyes upon the rich, deep beauty of the woman before me. She rose and rang the bell, then requested her maid to order a bottle of champagne.

This woman, too, was a mystery to me, a fascinating, unsolvable mystery. How could she while mourning for the brother so lately dead, even for a moment assume the calm indifference she now portrayed? She must be strong, remarkably strong

for a woman, I thought, her emotions are well under her control.

Tito's name did not pass our lips—no reference was made to his horrible end, yet it must have been uppermost in their minds as it was in mine.

A pause filled the time while the champagne was being served. Neither was hilarious enough to offer a toast. I believed Signorina Salvi ordered the wine for her own benefit. Stimulant for the time it lasts is strength. I was being consumed with curiosity to know more, but neither thus far had dropped a word I could construe into practical information. I had been sometime silent, and was about to ask when my disguise could be thrown off, but *la signorina* leaving the room at the moment interrupted the train of thought. She returned almost immediately, and filled our glasses once more. Coracio emptied his at a draught. The woman turned her eyes upon me with a mysterious expression in them as if desiring to question me. Then she spoke.

"*Caro* Coracio, you look tired, fatigued, repose yourself on that comfortable sofa. Signor Castleton will change with you."

It was done as soon as said. Some women are always obeyed in their most trivial requests. I thought nothing strange in this changing of chairs, but Signorina Salvi had a motive for it.

"*Je suis fatigué;* many thanks," said Coracio, and half reclined upon the sofa.

"The woman loves him," I thought, "passionately, devotedly."

As I looked at Coracio I noticed a drowsy expression come into his eyes, and he moved his limbs in a sleepy manner, yet seemed to fight against the sensations coming over him. But soon his head sank back and he fell into a profound sleep. This startled me.

"What is the matter, Coracio?" I exclaimed.

"Hush!" whispered the lady, "it is the effect of a potion I have given him. He will sleep an hour or more, that is all. Meanwhile I must put you on your guard. I must tell you many things to-night or you will make some clever mistake."

"Tell me at once!" I cried, under my breath, "did he murder your brother?" I sat breathless for a reply.

"No."

I did not believe her. I must devise some plan to draw her out, to gain her confidence in spite of her love for Coracio.

The high idea I at first entertained of the man was fast slipping away. I now not only believed him a villain but an unusually clever and desperate one. Something in the woman's manner made me feel that she was his friend, and from beginning to end in this affair would work for him, perhaps more as his slave than as his friend. Yet how could it be possible; was she not a sister of the murdered man? I confess my doubts grew more and more confused when I gazed into the lovely face, so soft, so pale, so delicate. Sometimes I felt as if I could forgive her even if she herself had struck the blow.

"No, no!" she repeated. "Coracio did not kill my brother."

"Well, then," I asked, "what part did he have to play? Do you know who did the deed?"

"I am not sure."

"By what means was he killed?"

"I am not sure. I believe poison."

"Do you know or guess a motive for the crime?"

"*Si signore*, I know all that."

I drew my chair nearer to her.

"Then for heaven's sake tell me all, do not let me drag on this life of suspense longer. I wish to aid you. Wherein this fearful secret affects you I know not, but I would befriend you. Let us hasten on to the end, and bring the assassin to justice."

She drew a sharp, spasmodic breath. The load on her mind shone sadly through her eyes with a painful intensity.

"No, no, not yet; I would not dare bring him to justice yet," she said.

"Do you love him?" I gasped, in a whisper, leaning forward till my hand touched her dress.

"Oh! yes, yes, very dearly; but he is not——" here she stopped; her words almost took away my breath.

"You love him!" I cried, "the murderer of your brother! Woman, are you insane? Are you the victim of some horrid spell which makes you talk as if mad?"

I became desperate; all seemed clear to me; she was the mistress of Coracio, the murderer of her brother. At the moment I almost hated her as much as I had loved my friend. I jumped to my feet, about to spring upon the man lying senseless on the sofa. She anticipated my movement. We left our chairs simultaneously. She clutched at my arm, saying,—

"It is you who are mad. What would you do? kill an innocent man? You do not understand."

She sank once more into her chair, and covering her face with her hands, wept bitterly. Her agitation was painful to witness.

"This is horrible," I said. "*Signorina*, why will you not tell me all, so that I may see as a man with open eyes; so that I may need no longer play the fool?"

"I hope to tell you all," she sobbed, "but now have not the courage, the time has not yet come. It is a long, horrid tale—*Per Dio!* I wish I were dead!"

I was almost overcome at the distress of mind she showed; what might it not be she was trying to keep from me? "It is no use," I thought, "I will learn from her what evidence, what facts I can, but the murderer's name must be known to me later on."

"Try and be calm," I said, mastering myself as best I could. "I realize you are a victim, as well as I am. Tell me, was this plot laid some weeks before it was carried out?"

"I suppose so."

"Was Coracio recognized as Tito's friend?"

"At one time, yes."

"But why this hasty trip to England on Coracio's part?"

"He feared Modenti. In case of disclosure the crime was to have fallen on your head."

"They knew how much we were to each other?"

"Yes."

"Was there jealousy?"

"I thing not."

"I have not known your family, but I knew there was some secret Tito never disclosed to me. He often spoke of you, was anxious that we should one day meet."

"*Cielo*! what a meeting it has been!"

Signorina Salvi was looking silently on the face of the man who lay as if dead before her. His pale face, deep slumber, and almost breathless body filled me with a sort of dread and fright. Surely Coracio was helpless and at my mercy now? I crossed to where he lay and placed my hand above his heart; it seemed scarcely to beat.

"I wonder you dare do this thing," I said, reproachfully. "This body seems half asleep and half dead."

"It will not harm him," she replied, "he gave me the potion himself because I could not rest at night."

"*Signorina*, tell me why this man has brought me here? Why has he pretended to befriend me, if he was the murderer of Tito?" I sat down on the edge of the sofa.

"He is not the murderer," she replied almost savagely. "Time will tell you the motive for taking you from England. He did befriend you. I suppose we are all safe if we do as he bids us."

"Ah! strange, strange it is," I cried; "I am here in Italy and now wish to remain to the end, to ferret and seek out my worst enemy and yours. I could not be driven from Italy now, or from this villain's side."

"Oh, may the end come soon!" she cried, despairingly. "Now that poor Tito is dead it seems as if I had borne all."

"I appreciate your sorrow as a brother would," I replied, affectionately; "but, come, cheer up, we hurry on the end, then follows rest for you, rest for mind and body."

I remembered her parents had been dead some years. She had no sister, then she must be quite alone, unless there was a brother. There probably was not, else I would have heard of him. I looked from her pale face to the death-like countenance of the man beside me.

"Will he not be enraged if he wakes and finds me with you? Will he not suspect you have given him this potion and played him false in some way?"

"Oh, no, you will be gone when he awakes; he will not be angry. Signor Coracio loves me." She said this softly, frankly, and with modesty; but the confession I did not expect to hear.

"If you are lovers then," I answered, rather bitterly I fear, "as he said we must work together and be friends, else acknowledged enemies. I am ready to be the friend of Coracio, unless he was instrumental in bringing about the death of the friend who was more than a brother to me."

"You may well be a friend to him, and to me," she simply said. "Soon you will know the truth of this exasperating case, then you will respect him."

In spite of her frank manner, engaging eye and voice, I feared this woman. I could not make up my mind whether she was true or false at heart. Love, even if it is misplaced will drive a woman to any length. Was she an accomplice? Was she playing a part to allure me still deeper into misery, to prove me the murderer of her brother? The mere thought horrified me—but who could know the truth? Why need I speculate longer with the meagre facts I had at my command?

"Will Cordelli and Modenti come to Italy and to Florence?" I asked, suddenly remembering them.

"I do not know—probably."

"What part did they play in this affair?"

"None whatever."

"Then I have no one to deal with but Coracio and the murderer?"

"*Si, si, signore,* you are right, you are beginning to understand."

"I understand but one thing, Signorina Salvi, I loved your brother almost as much as my life. He has been cruelly, brutally murdered. Could I believe you did the act I could kill you. You have a guilty glance when I look at you, and your answers are contradictory as if untruthful."

"Ah! but he is so near to me," she whispered, shudderingly.

"Who is so near to you?"

"No one, no one! For God's sake spare him and me for a time—if only for a time."

My words had suggested some thought to her which I could not know. I knew the conversation was drifting here and there about the truth, the knowledge of which could alone help me. I could learn nothing from the sister of Tito Salvi that night. She seemed to read my thoughts.

"Wait till we reach Florence," she said, "there will still be time."

"You may be right," I answered, feverishly, "but did you thirst for revenge as I do, you would not wait even a day, nor yet an hour." I arose to go. "I must depend on the future for your confidence."

"Good-night," I said, putting out my hand which she took and held. "Say nothing of our conversation to Coracio." I turned to the door leaving the woman standing, and the man still slumbering on the sofa. I left the house and sought my room at the hotel, but could not sleep. The paint upon my face had begun to irritate my skin. I tossed a long time, but within an hour heard Coracio come up the stairs, pass along the corridor and enter his room without disturbing me.

V.

THE next morning we left for Florence. Coracio went in a carriage for Eugenia Salvi, and I joined them at the station.

Coracio was himself once more. He did not refer to the meeting with Eugenia the night before. He seemed reasonable and politic, yet cordial to both of us. His nervousness had to a great extent departed. I had not yet been allowed to doff my priestly disguise, nor did I so desire. I felt like a culprit fleeing from justice when I thought of Coracio's words and his hints of evidence against me. I was innocent of having committed any crime or wrong; yet a crushing weight seemed to pull me down to the earth. I had but two ideas; the one to avenge my friend; the other to protect his sister did she need protection. Reader, I had not fallen in love with Eugenia Salvi; I did not think such an episode possible. It was certainly not a case of love at first sight, no matter what the future might bring forth. I only admired her, misunderstood, and, in a way, feared her.

We three occupied together a first-class carriage, and were alone except for Eugenia's maid who remained with her. Our conversation as we rolled along was commonplace in the extreme. All through that journey no word was spoken of the affair each had in mind. It was a relief, for I could at least think and speculate in regard to the future without being disturbed. Eugenia was fatigued and wearied, as well she might be. Had I known the truth as she was cognizant of it, it would not have surprised me had she gone mad.

I was by nature impulsive and enthusiastic, but my profession as a student of human nature had bridled and curbed to a great extent these traits. Intuitively, I quickly knew another's faults; but of late years I had grown less exacting in my standard of prejudiced opinion. If I heard a murder had been

committed, and took notes upon it, I put myself in the guilty one's place and wondered why he had done the deed, and asked nyself, "Is he as truly guilty as the world is apt to believe?" The line, even to-day, between a responsible and irresponsible act, is a vague nothing. The laws of human nature are too vast, too intricate and unfathomable for us to know the why and the wherefore of the deeds, thoughts and acts, which are ever and anon coming before our eyes and experience with such fearful magnitude as to appal us.

"It is of no use," I often repeated to myself. "While we are what we are, while men lay claim to natures composed of divine and devilish attributes alike, there is no mental or moral power which can explicate the motive and result of forces, strong and weak, working, grinding and enmeshing one with the other, while human experience and incident unite the warp and woof into an incomprehensible fabric of action."

Why then condemn the woman and the man in this affair, play what part they had, while I knew nothing of the obscure thread of their reasoning or the subtle power of their motives? It may have been avarice, greed, hate, rage or despair, which had led to the act that felled my friend. But who could say what power had caused the arm to be raised with the poisoned cup to his lips? Is it possible for a sane man to commit suicide?

My companions sat a long time at different intervals with eyes closed, but they did not sleep. I could feel the nervous play of their minds as they dwelt unceasingly upon the ordeal through which they were passing. The realization that they were ill at ease within, no matter how stolid their outward calm might seem, gave my own disquietude the help and sustaining quality of companionship.

I remember towards the end of our journey, as we neared Florence, I was filled with considerable annoying apprehension. We were nearing our destination; things could not go on much

longer in the same rut. What end had Coracio to make in this city where I was so well known, where I had so many friends? That the end had not come I fully realized. For the present the sky seemed clear, but who could tell how stormy the morrow might prove?

As we whistled into the station, I saw that Eugenia Salvi became thoughtful and preoccupied; then she soon relapsed into that semi-dazed, semi-conscious state I had noticed once or twice before. What could it mean? I had seen no demonstration of Coracio's fearful power since we left London. Could it be his influence that made her now seem to unconsciously follow and almost cling to him? Was she simply in a hypnotized state? I had no time to answer these conjectures

Scarcely had my foot touched the platform, than Coracio took my arm. I too succumbed. For the second time I was helpless. I felt my mind gradually weaken and reel within itself, as it were. One moment of agony, horrible and oppressive, then I followed him as a child, an imbecile—what you will. I followed him, oblivious to the throng about me, oblivious to the beauty of the city I could almost call my home, oblivious even to the memory of Tito Salvi, as I passed the spot were I said to him "*Addio*,"—alas! for ever. I was more than mesmerized. I was dead! dead to the passion of revenge which but so short a time before had wracked me through brain and nerve. Dead! helplessly, hopelessly dead, till this man should take his eye and his influence from me. From that moment I lost sight of Eugenia Salvi, and did not see her again. We hurried through the station and into a cab. Why had I not forethought, and prepared myself for this contingency? Was I lost for ever? To be hypnotized, to be bereft of one's mind, to become morally the slave of another, is horrible in the extreme—it is like giving one's soul up to perdition. I can vaguely remember what occurred—the outline of

events is alone intelligible to me. I might have stood on my head or done any equally absurd performance at Coracio's bidding, but I do not remember whether aught occurred, except that we took a carriage and drove off towards the *Ghetto*, or Jews quarter, a prison of the olden time—a part of Florence renowned in history, where the houses were built over vaults and secret passages, where dungeons, dark and foul, have for centuries kept their history of torture, famine and violent death. Here no daylight enters, here hope forsakes the victim, who, as in days of oppression, enters to starve and die. Such, however, was not my fate.

Coracio took me from the carriage a short distance from the entrance to an arch leading by a long corridor, narrow and dark, to a series of vaults. Through this corridor he led me. At the entrance he set me free, that is, unchained my mind, and I drew a long breath, relieving myself of a sensation as of suffocation. Dampness struck my face and feet; at the same time my nostrils filled with the odour of rotten wood and mould-covered stone. I clutched Coracio's arm. Was I, after all, to be put to death, and in this horrid place?

"For the sake of Heaven, do not bring me here," I cried, "the foulest spot in Florence! You know I have done no wrong. Man, man, treat me as a fellow-being! You know I am helpless; why then cast me in here?"

I was weak in every limb. It is usual after one has been a victim of mesmerism, that the mind acts slowly for a few moments, and the nerves and muscles become weakened and relaxed.

"I have sworn," he replied, "to protect you. You have been brought her for a purpose, but if you are discreet no harm will befall you."

His brilliant face and strong eye held me; trust this man I must to the end, or at least, till I was freed from his power. The long corridor through which we walked had numerous

smaller ones leading from it. A dingy lamp here and there at a junction between the passages, illuminated each for a few yards with a sickly light. I peered first down one and then down another, but my eyes encountered nothing save darkness.

Bats flew out from the corners above my head, and the noise of their wings in the silence and semi-darkness was weird and frightful.

"Coracio, if you incarcerate me here, if only for a night, I shall go mad! I have borne too much; your charm has weakened me beyond endurance. Stop! let us go back. Give me one more breath of God's fresh air. The polluted air of these corridors strikes freezingly to my very marrow."

"Courage, man," replied my companion, "it will not be for long—this night's work must be done—once over, no need to repeat it."

He had scarcely finished speaking, before he turned into a corridor stretching into darkness on our left. We stopped before an iron door, hanging unevenly, so long had it stood between walls, old and now settled with age. A huge padlock made this door firm on one side to the iron frame-work. My heart turned sick. A prison cell was before me—foul and unholy, bound round by stone and iron, so old and soaked in dampness, it seemed as if even the hardest metal must rot and crumble away.

Coracio took a key from his pocket, inserted it in the padlock and in a moment more the huge massive iron door that was to imprison me, perhaps for ever, creaked, turned on its rusty hinges, and swung back, while we entered my prison cell.

It was larger than I would have hoped had I dared hope at all. A thick straw carpet was upon the floor. A light hung from the ceiling, and through a red glass shade penetrated but feebly, as if ashamed to shine within so foul a place, and the moisture of grey walls and floor glistened beneath the thin rays of colour.

A few chairs and a small table were to be seen; and the aspect of the cell, at a first glance, was not so bad, coming from the dismal corridors.

At first I did not notice a comfortable-looking cot-bed in one corner behind the door. As my eye caught sight of it I saw a figure lying face to the wall as if asleep upon it. It struck me with a sense of fear to find I was not alone with Coracio. In spite of his fatal power he seemed like a friend to me.

"Coracio," I whispered hoarsely, clinging to him, "who is that?"

"A friend," he replied, also under his breath. I became as a thing of ice; my heart, I verily believed, stood still. *Was he, the man lying there asleep before me, the murderer of Tito Salvi?* Was he already caught and waiting to expiate his crime upon the scaffold?

"Sit down, sit down," said Coracio. "I will send some food to you."

"Don't leave me in the same cell with that," I gasped. "There will be more crime done; be wise, do not dare me. Were I myself, had you left me one muscle of strength——"

"He is a friend, I tell you," answered Coracio, with a faint smile. I could only see the outline of the figure on the cot; I dreaded meeting its features.

Coracio then took my watch from me that I might make no record of time, and said: "On the morrow you can doff your disguise." I did not resist as he took the timepiece, but was about to offer him the ring upon my finger as well.

"No, no, keep that," he said, and I believed him afraid to touch it. He then quickly left the cell. The door once more creaked and closed, but did not disturb the sleeper on the bed.

I sank exhausted into a chair. It had come to this: I was imprisoned for murdering the friend I loved, for murdering the friend I now mourned as a lost brother. Imprisoned for a

crime I had no part in ; ay, imprisoned for a crime of which I had not been accused. My heavens! what injustice! How far would I be led, down, down to despair, till my mind would fail and my own hand snap the bond that bound me to so hellish an existence? Would I never see revenge like a flaming sword at hand ready to meet my grasp? Ah, *Dio!* could I have believed for a moment that the man sleeping in the cell with me, but a few rods away, was the guilty one, I would have crawled upon him, weak as I was, then and there and strangled him while he slept. Reckless of the hereafter—regardless of the consequences—I would have buried my nails deeply into his throat till I heard his last stifled gasp. I endeavoured to calm myself and succumb to fate. I leaned my head upon my hands in an effort to unite desire, hope, and prayer—prayer for relief—prayer for the friend who was no more. Yes, and to pray for all men, persecuted, innocent and tried, yet worst of all, unconvicted.

The man on the bed awoke and moved ; drew a long breath and sat up. I raised my head, rubbed my eyes intending to study the face, and if possible to be friends with my fellow-prisoner. One look was enough. There was a loud cry—a loud, long, spasmodic laugh that must have shaken the old prison to its foundations—a cry as when some furious animal is released from a trap, a laugh of triumph, as when some madman, with one thought intent, fancies he sees the fulfilment of his frantic desire. It was I who screamed—it was I who laughed.

On the cot before me, not a dozen yards away, sat the figure with face, feature, smile and contour of Tito Salvi—my murdered friend. I rushed into his arms as though I had been a soul in hell and he an angel from heaven come to liberate me. The joy of seeing him so suddenly, after days of mental agony, took my breath and senses from me. His features and smile faded away as I looked, and I fell senseless on the cot beside him.

VI.

TOGETHER, and in prison! Not that I was under penalty of the law, nor could I believe Tito was there for other reason than that demon-hearted men, for some villany unknown to us, or at least to me, had seen fit to confine him. As yet what could the law or the authorities in either country know of the affair? I was in prison, but in prison I had found my friend. I blessed the cold, damp walls that had given him up. I blessed Coracio for bringing me where he was.

On awakening from the fainting sleep I found myself still lying on the couch, and Tito sitting beside me. But the emotions of delight at seeing him were now changed to physical suffering.

His face was sunken and pale—his short prison life had left its marks of misery. My own hands were hot and feverish, my brain was bewildered, my lips parched and dry. The series of shocks which had come upon me one after another, the loss of sleep, the damp of the stone cell—all had combined to render me susceptible to illness. I lay for a long time without making effort to speak or move. I tried to persuade myself that I had been dreaming—that Tito's death had been but a fancy of the imagination—an abortive phantasmagoria that at last had reached its finish. For a long time I lay as one in a trance, my eyes open; my head throbbing with pain as if to burst; my ideas scattered and uncontrollable. At last I spoke.

"Tito."

"*Cosa caro?*"

It was his voice, the same as in the days gone by.

"Why are we here?"

"I, too, might ask you, Paul, why am I here?"

"But you came first. I found you in this cell. Tito, surely you have been accused of no crime?"

He did not reply immediately. I could imagine no reason why he should be silent; now that I know all, I wonder he did not exclaim, turn pale as the dead, or remain for ever dumb at the question.

"It is all stranger than fiction," I continued. "Tito, how long have you been confined here?"

"Nearly three days, I believe."

"Then you have not been in London since I left Florence?"

"No, no, Paul; but what ails you? you are dreaming, you are ill, boy!"

He took my hand and held it, but not with the old familiar, firm grasp. I thought his own trembled.

"But one is not thrown into a prison vault simply for being ill. My head begins to swim, Tito, and I am half dead with thirst."

There are some diseases of the brain, proceeding from a weakened state of the nerves that render all the affairs of daily life obscure like the actions and circumstances of a confused nightmare. I was suffering from a similar malady. I knew all that took place at the moment of its occurrence, but soon events became misty, intangible, and dubious. So my inclination was to put questions without fully comprehending the import of their answers.

"You look famished," replied Tito. "He will soon bring or send us something to eat and drink. It is an hour later than usual."

"Who is he—Coracio?"

"Yes."

"Heavens! since I have found you alive and with me, I have thought him a myth—the character of a dream."

"No, no! Coracio is my friend—our friend—it was he who brought you here."

Tito's friend and mine! Then he was a being in reality, not a murderer. How I had wronged him! Eugenia had spoke

the truth. *Was I going mad?* Had my brain already snapped the cord of reason and sanity? Was I about to seek the murderer of a man sitting beside me alive and comparatively well? I looked into Tito's face. He smiled and placed his cold hand upon my forehead.

"*Ah! per Cielo, amico mio, questo è paradeso!*"

It did indeed seem a Heaven of satisfaction and repose to me; such a moment of calm after hours of turbulent suspense. Then memory, ever variable, came with a new vision of horrible import.

"*Cielo*, Tito, what is that?"

I grasped his arm with the grip of a man possessed. Upon the palm rested a deep, dark stain of blood—so filthy to look upon, I wondered it did not crimson my own hand, the clothes he wore, the white sheet upon the cot.

"*Caro* Paul, what ails you? you are not yourself!" Speaking thus Tito sprang to his feet and threw me back; I had alarmed him by my sudden cry and clutch.

"It has gone," I gasped, "thank Heaven it has gone."

I grasped his hand again and held it to my eyes—its palm was stainless, it had been but the fancy of my overwrought brain.

"Oh, when, when will this horrid nightmare pass and be gone forever?" I cried; "every spark of intelligence will leave me if I suffer and see these hellish visions longer."

I fell back upon the cot, miserable and despairing. The manner of my friend changed. He moved to a further corner of the cell where I could not see him, but his loud, hard breathing seemed as if every breath caused pain. I could not speak for some time; at last I said:—

"Tito, you do not seem like yourself, what has made all this change?"

"Nothing seems as it should to you, my boy; your nerves are unstrung—thought is a burden to you—you are ill and

half mad. I will beg Coracio to take us away from here at once."

Oh! the thought was like elixir to my weakness—to leave with my persecuted friend this horrid dungeon, and cast aside with its filth and dampness the horrors of the past few days!

"We will be free, Tito, perhaps to-night?" I said, excitedly. "Is there not a chance?—tell Coracio I am dying—it may not be far from the truth—dying or nearing madness, I know not which."

"I will do my best to get us both out of this place to-morrow."

"And you will take me to her, Tito?—to Eugenia?"

"But you have never seen her," he quickly replied, scarcely above a whisper.

"Yes, oh! yes I have!" I broke forth exultingly. "She is very like you. I have seen her, I have seen her. Her face is as pale as a lily—her eyes are large and dark—her forehead low—her nose and mouth small but beautiful. I tell you I have seen her, Tito."

"*Dio!* perhaps so, but only in a dream."

"Then we live in our dreams," I answered, my eyes still filled with the vision of the lovely woman. "Dream or no dream, you cannot take the knowledge of her from me; for I have seen her and shall never forget her face."

But my next thought was blinding and stupefying. Tito had said it was all a dream. There had been then no days of horror, filled with crime and mystery; but only dreamland fancies of purgatory which would fly my brain with the morning, leaving the bright vision of Eugenia. A smile of triumph parted my lips, and I felt as if I would laugh loud and long but could not.

"So, Tito, my friend, you are not dead? You need not answer, I know you are here with me."

I had become greatly excited within the last half hour, and now the blood surging through the veins of my head half stupefied me. I continued to mumble rather than talk.

"But why am I in this cowl—this priestly disguise?" I ejaculated, fingering the rosary at my side. Perhaps I was seeing myself in a vision, in these robes so new to me.

"Come here, Tito—sit beside me, my eyes are misty but I want to see you." My voice sounded like the voice of an inebriate. "Come! come! don't sulk in the corner there, when I awake this cell will be a *salon*, this prison will be a palace."

"Be calm, my boy," answered Tito's voice from the corner. "Do not trouble your poor head about trifles; to-morrow you will be yourself again."

His voice so natural, his face, though worn, the same as before that horrid vision of the London chamber, the grasp of his hand, all stimulated within me the hope that reality was bliss, strong and satisfactory. Visions and dreams only were horrible and murderous. To-morrow I would awake once more. The vaulted ceiling above my head would break and stretch away into a blue Italian sky. Beneath my feet would be the meadows, soft and green, of Tito's country. Tito would be with me alive and well. Yes, he is with me now, but I cannot realize it

"I believe I need rest," I said. "My thoughts are all confusion. Tito, in this horrid dream I have mourned you as a dead brother. In this dream I have met your sister, and almost loved and hated her at the same moment. I have known Coracio. He seemed to befriend me. I wonder whether people in real life whom we have never met can come to us in dreams with the faces of reality so that we may know them again."

"Who can tell what realities may absorb our sleep, Paul? It may be possible."

"Oh, there is one thing more, Tito. Is Coracio a mesmerist?" I fancied the faint colour left his cheek and his grasp became less firm.

"I have heard it said," he slowly responded, "but I do not

know whether it is true—nor do I believe all I hear, particularly of Coracio."

"My dream was horrible, Tito. I thought he was more devil than man, and had that horrid hypnotic power which compelled every one to become his victim at any moment he wished."

"Forget your dream—it is but a fancy that will fly with the morning."

"Please God it may!" I cried, vehemently; "but, Tito, do you know Cordelli and Modenti?"

"I never heard of them."

"Then there was no murder, no crime, naught but a miserable fancy of the brain. Away with superstition and presentiments."

Reader, these words I repeated to myself a hundred times or more as I lay there, treasuring them like gifts of gold. Can you not imagine the satisfaction with which I uttered them; sitting beside my friend and believing the nights and days of agony through which I had passed to be but the conjuring of my own vivid and diseased imagination?

Tito at the word murder dropped my hand, rose to his feet and paced the narrow limits of our cell, back and forth behind me where I could not see him. Again I shut my eyes, trying to shut out the vision of the past, in no sense positive whether it was vision or reality. Then I felt Tito's cold hand upon my forehead. He leaned over me till I felt his breath on my face, and he said:—

"Poor devil, you are ill—sleep, sleep; sleep alone can rest you."

His influence calmed me. I opened my eyes and looked into his own, then placed my hand on his head and buried my fingers in his hair to make sure I was not still dreaming. Then I fell asleep and slept like one dead.

When I awoke Coracio was in the cell. He had not forgotten me. On the table which had been moved near to my cot, was

a tray with bread, meat and wine. He was talking in an undertone with Tito. As soon as I awoke, he came to the side of the cot and bade me eat. But I could not. Though half famished as I was, the first mouthful nauseated me. The darting pains in my head became more unbearable and a chill as if from the damp atmosphere caused me to shake from head to foot. A raging fever was consuming me. Tito had spoken the truth, I was ill. An expression of alarm spread over Coracio's face.

"This will never do; we cannot let an innocent man die in this hole. Salvi, we must take him from here this very night."

At the moment I felt as if his words had come too late. I believed I was dangerously ill. A weight upon my chest seemed to crush into my lungs with deadly pain; but if Tito remained at my side alive and well, if the few coming hours or days would prove that visions only had absorbed my brain, then would I willingly share any dungeon with him; ay, more, I would gladly share the penalty of any crime.

But fate had in a sense better things in store for me. I was compelled to spend but one night in that vile, damp vault. I surely should have died, had I been obliged to breathe the foul air a day longer in my present condition, and added one more to the long list of those who, through the ages, have perished within that series of tombs.

The next day I was led out, back through the narrow corridors, dark alike in the night or the day, back to the warmth and sunshine, back to a world of light and life. As I passed under the entrance arch of the ancient prison, I remembered the months and years of agony marked by no timepiece, nor rise nor set of sun, that had been spent therein, lives that had been put out by starvation and murder. And I thanked God that I was doomed to spend one night only in such a death stricken habitation.

A turn or two and we were passing through the familiar

streets and squares of the old city and had neared the *Via Tornabuoni.* Here we took a cab and were driven across the *San Trinita* bridge, out through the *Porta Romana*, thence out beyond the famous *Colli* drive, which skirts the heights above the city. On and on we drove an hour or more till we reached an isolated villa charmingly located near the famous *Certosa* of Florence. Many an excursion I had taken in the neighbourhood. Every hill, tower and road was as familiar to me as were the temples and squares of my native city, familiar with memories of the brightest days of my life, though days spent in the land of a foreign people.

VII.

THE villa to which I was taken stood on an eminence. It overlooked the fair, vineyard-covered hills, and slopes of olive orchards. Galileo's tower looked down from a still higher knoll; and the rambling buildings of the ancient monastery stood out against the sky in sombre grandeur, hiding its self-imposed prison lives, of monk and sage. Florence lay behind us, its tall towers and spires shooting up from the environing hills, in graceful piles. The spot we had reached had long been a coveted one, so lovely was its location, overlooking the hills, valleys, ruins and wealth of vegetation adorning the surrounding country. Many times I had, in days gone by, passed the spot, and remarked upon its beauty, but I had never heard the name of its owner.

When we rolled out from the city I closed my eyes, so great was the pain in my temples. But the agony of suspense had been greatly relieved. I did not allow myself to dwell much upon the trials of the past few days. Ever and anon Eugenia's face, calm and benign flitted before my mind's eye. I wondered was she as lovely in reality as she had appeared to me, and when I should see her again,

The villa, as we neared it, was half hidden by the firs and ilex trees of its own extensive grounds. The houses nearest to it in like manner were nearly out of sight. It seemed a trifle melancholy as we approached the hill which it crowned, and I opened my eyes to follow Coracio's finger as he pointed out our destination. We wound up the long avenue, and as we neared the porch a huge Russian hound came bounding to meet us. He was a beautiful creature, and I took a boy's delight in admiring his great head, and shining drab coat.

"To the devil!" said Coracio, as the huge brute dashed back and forth, barking lustily, and leaping up at the horse's face. No word had been said to inform me who was master of this palatial residence, but I presumed Coracio was its owner, for the dog knew his voice, and obeyed his will to the extent of crouching for a moment to the ground, and becoming less furious in his antics at a glance from my guardian.

The front door opened as we stopped, and a butler came down the steps. This butler was old and grey. From his age and manner I judged he had been long in the service of Coracio. Nor was I wholly wrong in this conjecture. I soon found he knew well his master's ways, anticipated his silent wishes as well as his orders, and, so it seemed to me, was unusually expeditious in executing them. The old servants who for years have broken the bread of servitude under the same roof, overlooking with jealous eye the care and comfort, as well as the misfortunes and prosperity of two generations—father and son; are always acquainted with the virtues and vices of the men they serve, as well as the mysteries, domestic quarrels, and factions of the family. It is the butler of the ancient *régime* who learns from the early days of his apprenticeship the use of the two great powers of the world—diplomacy and tact.

I thought of this as I looked into the face of Coracio's servant the first time. In case of future emergency, could I not depend upon this veteran, learn and utilize his knowledge of

his master, and his master's family. His manner was marked by the greatest respect. In detail his work as body-servant had undoubtedly been conscientiously done.

"My man," said Coracio, as we passed through the hall, "the best place for you is your bed. Pardon, signore, I will do the honours myself and show you to your room. Carlo"—turning to the servant, "you expected us, and there is a fire in the blue front?"

"*Si, si, signore,*" answered Carlo and took my cloak; I had not removed my monk's cap. I rejoiced that I was to be permitted so soon to rest my splitting head and tired limbs on a comfortable bed. "You are right, Signor Coracio, bed is the best place for me, but do not ask me to-night to thank your for your hospitality." I am sure the smile that spread over my features was a vain effort at courtesy.

"There is time enough for that," replied Coracio, good-naturedly, and my foot sank into the rich stair carpet as I began to ascend, followed by Coracio and Tito. The latter had said but little during the drive from Florence.

I supposed his reticence was due to the weariness and mental confusion which impressed him. He took my arm as we passed upstairs but still remained silent. I was shown into the "blue front," the windows of which on one side overlooked the drive and front grounds. It was evidently the guest chamber of this sumptuous villa; handsomely furnished in old blue Venetian satin with hangings of the same. The chairs, bed, and dressing-case were a mixture of antique and modern workmanship, the woodwork being handsomely carved or inlaid. The appointments of the whole villa were characteristically Florentine. There were splendid specimens of furniture, paintings, and statuary of several centuries gone by. But then when I was brought to this comfortable, hospitable room, direct from a prison cell, I was more engrossed by the desire to rest, and took little notice of these things. I was far from

being in my normal condition, as the reader knows. Tired almost to exhaustion, and on the eve of a malignant fever. Coracio was all hospitality, solicitous in word and act for my comfort and luxury. Pointing to the bell knob he said :—"If you desire anything command my servants." Then I shook hands with him and Tito, said "good-night" and they left me. I could not but detect a troubled look in Tito's eye. At the time I did not know these men could see I was growing rapidly ill, and they remained silent, fearful of aggravating my malady by alarming me in regard to my condition. Had it been otherwise I would undoubtedly have been left a prisoner in that horrid *Ghetto* vault, for how long who could tell ?

I prepared to undress. Despite my feverish state the luxury of my surroundings was grateful to me. The genial glow of the fire was satisfying as I mentally contrasted it with the cold, dull, gray of my prison walls. I loosened the white cord about my waist ; slipped the sandals from my feet, and laying aside my monkish robe, felt that I was putting off the horrors which had accompanied its adoption.

I was too weak to attempt the removal of the painted mask. The luxuriously hung and quilted bed with its dainty satin and white lace arrested my longing gaze. For the first time since I entered the room I then saw what sent a nervous thrill through me. Opposite the bed in a corner partially hid by the shadow of the hangings stood my trunk or at least another exactly like it. How had it come there ? I was too used to mysteries to even attempt to answer the question. I tried to smile. "This is surely my trunk and the evidence it had contained was but the evidence of a dream." I put out the light, crawled into bed, exasperated, worn out and seemingly ready to die with fatigue. I slept ; how long I cannot say.

When I awoke a bright light illuminated the room. Sitting in a chair beside my bed was a man I had never seen. He held my wrist, noting the beatings of my pulse. The pain in

my head was stupefying. I could but partially open my eyes. My lips seemed cracking with heat and my tongue swollen and burning.

There was no doubt the man beside me was a physician.

Coracio stood near the foot of the bed anxiously watching he doctor's face. He had become alarmed in regard to my condition, had removed the disguise from my face and then sent for medical advice. I suppose it was well he lost no time. I was very ill, seriously, dangerously ill. I knew it all. I closed my eyes as a snapping, breaking sensation seemed to crack my forehead. I heard the doctor call for writing materials, I knew he wrote a prescription. Then in a whisper I could not hear, he gave some orders to Coracio. I caught the words "subject to nightmare," as my host replied. What followed was lost to me.

Coracio! How the significance of that name had changed since first I heard it. He had indeed proved a friend in this hour of sudden illness. Some cold liquid was placed to my lips, by whose hands I knew not. My eyes felt as if sealed with lead. Ice was bound about my forehead.

The light was lowered and I slept—but not the refreshing, restful sleep of health—rather the wild imaginings and frightful dreams of a fever bursting brain. I became conscious but once during that long night of delirium. It was to find Tito watching in the chair beside my pillow—watching—watching, not knowing but every hour would be my last.

No need to tell in detail what followed. Four long weeks I lay in Coracio's house wracked by disease, now and again lying at death's door—but not to die. The constancy of the friends about me—their careful nursing—battled successfully with the fever, and I doubt not but that the physician was prayed to do his utmost for my recovery.

Most of the time during those weeks of pain I lay unconscious of my surroundings. I remember once waking late at night

—I think it was already past midnight—a hand was upon my forehead affording relief for the moment by its gentle, cooling touch. As if a vision from Heaven had descended to cheer me, I beheld the placid face of Eugenia Salvi. She too had watched beside me day after day, and night after night. Devoted, because devotion to the helpless who came across her path was an outgrowth of her nature. Of course I realized little or nothing at the time. It was all made known to me afterwards.

At the end of the fourth week I began to regain strength and was in a fair way of becoming convalescent. I seemed to have forgotten the past, as dawning conciousness brought to my weakened state a brighter hue to life; for the pain had left me, leaving in its place that sense of relief from thirst and fever, which makes even the sensation of absolute weakness almost enjoyable. For days and days together I saw nothing of Tito Salvi. Sometimes I wondered why he did not come to me. Once a day Coracio came to enquire after my state of health, usually in the evening. He was always cheerful, not to say jovial. My recovery had taken a heavy load from his mind. He would sometimes take my hand saying, "Cheer up, old man; in a few days you will be yourself again." I could feel the flow of magnetism from his arm enter mine. He was turning his occult, hypnotic power to good use. After he had been with me I usually slept a calm, refreshing sleep, which did more to bring me to a normal state than all the chemist's drugs.

Eugenia seemed always with me, her face more transparently white than ever before. She talked but little, yet every word was a word of kindness—every act an act of devotion. She seemed to be the sunshine in the room; the perfume of the flowers that found their way daily, I know not how, to my chamber. Noiselessly, gracefully she flitted about, my eyes following her, my heart blessing her for a thousand kindnesses known and unknown to me. No sister could have been more

untiring in her acts of sympathy and well chosen words of encouragement.

Occasionally there would flit into my mind a fearful memory of the past few weeks. I tried in vain to recall what was truth and what was fancy. Then I resolved to forget. In memory lay doubt and agony. I would forget reality and dreams together. I would cling only to the present and what the future might bring. I came to the following conclusion. On the night when I supposed I had left Florence and Tito for London I had fallen ill, delirious, filled with strange dreams and visions. All that I had experienced—the trip to London; the small hotel near Russell Square; the trunk; its contents; the letter; my murderous companions; the mesmerist; my disguise; the return to Italy; the meeting of Eugenia Salvi; the prison cell—all, all a dream—all the hallucinations of my delirium.

I supposed also that I was at the residence of the Salvis; that I had been taken there on my becoming ill; that Tito had interested his sweet sister in my behalf. Reader, I do not need to place before your imagination the bliss of this conclusion. You can guess without the telling, what satisfaction, what happiness was mine, as I lay and said over and over again to myself, "Tito is not dead; it was a dream—all, all a dream. I have been asleep and seen visions of hell; but now am awake and see Heaven in reality." Oh, when in life have I known such hours of perfect rest, peace, and satisfaction as when convalescent I awoke from that long illness of the brain!

My trunk now stood where it could be plainly seen from the bed. I noticed one day it stood open and I could see a part of its usual contents, my own effects, clothing, etc., nothing more sinister—no vision like that of my dream was connected with it now. All this too brought a sufficing sense of relief.

I sometimes wondered why Tito did not come oftener to my room. I did not for a moment suppose it was for other reason

than that the poor fellow was as usual at his work ; and knowing I was carefully attended by his sister failed to think I needed him. Eugenia seldom mentioned her brother.

One evening, just before sunset (I knew the hour by the bright rays which streamed into the room and fell aslant the floor and across Eugenia's lap as she sat beside my bed), I had been watching her face for some time, but her eyes were bent to the floor. It pained me to note her sad expression which seemed habitual, and was far too gloomy to be worn by such a lovely countenance. Once or twice I thought tears filled her eyes, then concluded it was but the weakness of my own. I seemed filled with a growing strength that defied the weakness of disease. Some emotion was absorbing me. I raised myself slowly, with great effort, on one arm that I might look more fully into her face. I could remain quiet no longer, in spite of the physician's strict orders to be as tranquil as possible. I must speak. I wanted to listen to Eugenia's voice.

"Eugenia," I began

"*Che vuole, signore?*" She turned and gazed with a deep loving, tender expression into my eyes.

What indeed did I wish ? What was desire to me now but to hear the voice and see a smile upon the face of my lovely benefactress.

"Have I been very ill?"

"Yes, but you have quite recovered now. The doctor says to-morrow——"

"How long have I been here, Eugenia?"

"A long time, *signore*, nearly five weeks, I believe. Take no thought of time, for you are welcome."

"And all this while you, your brother and Coracio have been more than devoted to me. Your thousand kindnesses make it seem but yesterday."

"No wonder," replied the sympathetic girl, "you have been wild and unconscious most of the time."

"It is your care and nursing that has saved me—I know, I feel it. Your untiring self-denial and solicitous watching have done much more for me than all the doctor's skill. Oh! how shall I ever express or render sufficient thanks! And you are all but strangers to me, too."

"Do not ask; do not speak of thanks," she replied, while a tinge of warm colour appeared beneath her transparent skin. "To be successful is reward enough for those who watch and wait, Tito has said." At the mention of his name she turned her face from me and stopped. I strove not to notice her emotion. "You have heard him say it a hundred times," she continued presently.

"Yes, yes, so I have; but that is not enough," I replied fervently. "My heart is beating with gratitude towards you all. What does—what can a drowning man do as recompense when he is dragged from the water and magnanimously saved by another? Words, empty words are useless, a life of sacrifice is poor pay for such benefits. May God grant that I may return in fitting measure to both Tito and yourself a thousand times the goodness and devotion you have lavished upon me. You have been more even than a sister to me. I know it. I believe you are now half ill through watching night after night by my side. You have been weighed down with fatigue and anxiety, knowing that your brother's friend lay at the point of death. Your touch, Eugenia—forgive me—your cool, soft hand upon my head, drove madness from my brain. Your voice and smile turned frightful dreams and fitful ravings into visions of delight and hours of perfect rest. To you I owe all—my life, my happiness."

"But those dreadful nights have passed," she said, trying to force a smile of unconcern. "You are now nearly well, there is sufficient time for me to rest and regain my strength. Do not think of me—of us—you will need still more patient waiting—all the quiet and peace of mind you can get. Let no thought

of the past retard your complete recovery. Come! *amico mio*, you have been talking too much. You are more feverish, the doctor will find your pulse quicker. Here, take a little refreshment. For once you must say this is delicious, for I made it."

She spoke with a sort of forced gaiety, as one is apt to do when endeavouring to cheer an ill child. She crossed to a table and took from a silver jar packed in ice, a lemon sherbert, brought it to me, and proceeded to feed me with a spoon as though I had been indeed a child. I was still too weak to raise my arm to my mouth continuously without much effort. I know gratitude looked from my eyes into hers—there was no need of commonplace words of thanks as I took the delicacy from her hand and swallowed the ice which seemed like balm to a bleeding wound. Her hand was not steady. The painfully sad look did not leave her face and this time, I could not be deceived, there were tears glistening in her eyes.

"Eugenia, tell me, why did I see you in my dreams? Why did I see your face as I see it now, if we have never met before?"

"Who can tell, *signore?* I know not, but pray do not mention your delirium again; it only recalls to my mind your ravings and your pain," she answered, hastily, with a visible effort at composure. "Forget them, for ever, let them fade from your memory as the sun's rays are now fading from the world."

She returned the ice to the table, then sat down and covering her face with her hands wept softly, scarcely uttering a sob. What gloom hung over this lovely woman? What memory haunted her, that she endeavoured in vain to cast away?

"As you will, Eugenia," I whispered; "but tell me that I need never forget your face or your devotion."

I could see my words moved her. But why? with what woe or passion was this woman struggling? The last rays had left the room, and there remained but the dusky gloom of twilight, always the saddest hour to watchers in a sick room; the hour

when the sun, as if weary with his beneficent labours, steals away from the world, as a friend may tire of the loved one's ingratitude, leaving about the earth and in the heart the dubious mists of evening. At twilight the intangible longing of the soul doth yearn with double pain for the celestial fruition of spirit's assimilation with spirit. So yearned my soul for her, who now seemed more like spirit-form, a shadow rather than something earthly.

Several moments we remained silent, and in those moments it all came to my inmost thought; came as it comes but once in life, without word or heralding. Then I knew why Eugenia had remained with me night and day; why, as I lay tortured and burning, she prayed for long hours that I might recover. I knew it all in a moment; there could be no mistake. She so near to me was still too far away. New strength came to my every nerve and fibre. I drew my arms from beneath the coverlid and stretched them eagerly towards her, the lovliest woman in the world—then drew them back, while selfish tears of joy mingled with tears of longing pain, flooded from my eyes upon my face and neck.

"Let me love you, Eugenia," I breathed. "Let this be the beginning, not the end of your devotion."

She sat trembling like a frightened bird, but not for long. Suddenly she made a desperate effort to tear herself from me, and having raised herself, looked with an expression of mingled love and hate, pressed one loving, passionate kiss upon my forehead, then stood erect.

"Then you will be my wife; that kiss is your answer?" I cried in ecstasy, but she started to cross the room with a wild, despairing movement. At my words a stifled cry escaped her lips, and a moment more she had flown from the room, leaving me aghast at her incomprehensible, strange, bewildered manner.

Yes, reader, Eugenia Salvi proved to be the one woman in the world whom I could love and cherish. Tito's sister, and no

other, must be my wife. I knew she loved me from the moment first I felt her kiss upon my forehead. The past weeks of suffering had silently, without my knowing it, pleaded my cause. Pity and sympathy had stirred her heart at first as I lay unconscious. Sympathy had developed and strengthened, till a deeper and stronger passion absorbed her. In spite of her strange manner as she fled from the room, I was content The refulgent bloom of happiness flooded its hues upon my soul. I was content. Soon to be well and strong, soon to have Eugenia my wife, for ever by my side; soon to forget the pain of illness, even the horrors of a past no longer reality.

The days now flew by to me on wings of air; the hours were marked by her going and coming. At first Eugenia seemed restrained, but prudently I did not mention our love to her again. Her confidence returned. I knew I did not understand her. Who could say why her eyes so often filled with tears? Who knew the meaning or cause of the look of fear that so often clouded her face? I was satisfied to leave it to the future, when my time would come to clear all shadows from her pathway. I did not doubt but that I could win her. Already I felt her heart was beating with love for me. What more then had I to ask? A few weeks, a few days, perhaps, would explain all. I would not burden my happiness with unfounded doubts; besides, Eugenia was with me. I saw her many, many times a day. We kept our secret; we alone knew of the fires raging within us.

Sleep! delicious, restoring sleep, filled the hours when she was not with me. No more murderous visions haunted by dreams; now bliss, happiness even of Heaven upon earth fired my imagination, whether waking or sleeping. Eugenia loved me! it was enough. I blessed the illness, pain, and almost death, that had drawn and charmed the loveliest woman in the world to my side.

VIII.

I AWOKE one night and soon after heard the hall clock chime ten. My first sensation was of possessing greater strength than I had known since my illness. New forces seemed to be reaching through and through me. New vigour seemed in every muscle. The light burned low; there was no one in the room. I watched the outline of the objects the chamber contained. The costly furniture which took strange shapes in the weird light. The high-arched and frescoed ceiling and heavily-draped windows. As yet I had not had time to feel at home in my new quarters. Although I had been four weeks or more confined to this room, till now I had only taken a superficial glance at my surroundings. My waking moments since my unconscious state had been mostly taken up in watching Eugenia as she moved about or sat by my side.

I have said I felt greatly refreshed and strengthened, as I looked about the apartment the desire to test my strength suddenly came upon me. I sat up, in a moment had recovered from the dizzy sensation caused by the movement. I was encouraged by finding myself less weak than I had dared hope. Obeying an irresistible impulse I threw back the bed-clothes and put one foot out on to the floor, then the other, till I stood for a few seconds, trembling but soon recovering myself. A handsome woollen rug lay at the foot of the bed, and near it a long quilted dressing-gown and slippers. I put on the gown and slippers and threw the rug about my shoulders, then sat on the edge of the bed to rest after my exertions. As I turned my head towards the light my eye caught sight of a note pinned to the pillow from which I had just taken my head. My first thought was that it would probably prove to be the doctor's prescription; but no, perchance a note left by some

one who wished me to find it on awakening. I was right. I unpinned it and read as follows:

"*Caro* Paul,—

I came in and found you asleep. Rather than awake you I scrawl this line to say I am off to Milan for a few days. Make haste and get well.

"*Addio,*

"TITO."

Having read the note I refolded it and put it in the pocket of the dressing-gown. There seemed nothing strange in Tito's sudden departure; he was often called away here or there on a short visit of business or pleasure. For the time I dismissed the note and its contents from my mind, expecting Eugenia to give me full particulars when she returned.

I stood up and slowly moved from chair to chair; stood at the window and looked out over the fairest of all Italy's fair cities. Her church towers, dome and *campanile* rested against the sky in the yellow sheen of the moon. The sky, without a cloud, was blue and filled with stars. A lovely picture it was, seen from the height above the city. The Arno lay dark between its massive walls lined with gas jets stretching on as far as the eye could reach in one uninterrupted line of light. The misty vapour enshrouding the scene was changed by the moon's rays into an ethereal magnificence of light, till dome and tower, meadow and castle-crowned hill, all became shadowy and colourless as if fashioned from the vapours about them. What a vision, fantastic and slumber-like, culminating in a scene of enchantment, blessing my tired eyes! I looked long and gratefully satisfied. Then I turned from the window and buried my face in a bouquet of fragrant flowers: it was like taking a deep breath of air from outside the sick-room. I sat down, occasionally examining everything of interest the room contained.

The door stood ajar; a light burned in the hall outside. I

watched it, then had a desire to investigate beyond the walls of my bedroom. Perhaps this desire to see more of the house in which I had so unexpectedly become a guest was only natural, after my long confinement. I longed to see the rooms downstairs ; the beautiful works of art which I felt undoubtedly adorned them. I opened wide the door and stood on the threshold. I could hear no sound above or below stairs. All was still save a cathedral clock which chimed every fifteen minutes. I was surprised at my own strength and crossed the hall to look over the baluster into the hall below. Eastern rugs were on the floor. Massive furniture and marble statues stood here and there at intervals in corners and niches along the walls. All looked rich and luxurious. I was not satisfied. I wanted to push further on and see more of my new home. Steadying myself by the railing, I reached the top of the stairs. What impulse led me on I know not. More than once I thought myself imprudent and half turned back ; but the perfect quiet had a fascination. There was a charm in all my surroundings. I wanted to look at the dial of the clock which had such a musical chime. Grasping the baluster firmly, step by step I passed slowly down the stairs. The heavy carpet smothered the sound of my footfall. The house seemed deserted. I could hear no one, neither voice nor movement.

As I reached the lowest step I saw a room unlighted on my left—this I took to be the drawing-room. Opposite the door was another apartment that I could plainly see was a library ; for a lamp burning dimly on the centre-table disclosed huge, finely-carved book-cases, which stood about the walls, and the table itself was covered with newspapers, books, and writing utensils. Several large portraits hung about, but in the dimly-lighted room I could not trace the features at a distance

"An author's paradise," I thought as I entered the room with its extensive, valuable library and wealth of artistic work. I sank into a chair near the table, turned up the light, and spent

some time in quietly gazing at the portraits. One only was familiar to me; a full length oil painting of Coracio. It was marvellously executed and perfect as a likeness. I fancied I could see the same light in the painted eye that in my dreams had caused me to believe him a mesmerist.

"If this is Tito's home," I said to myself, "Coracio indeed must be a near friend to have so fine a portrait of himself upon the wall. Why had Tito spoken so little to me of him?"

My eyes soon grew tired in their weak state gazing at the painted faces and forms of men and women I had never known or ever heard of. I turned to the books lying nearest to me on the table. I opened two or three at random. They were principally in Italian, but here and there I found an English volume. Suddenly, one particularly attracted my notice. It was a gift-book handsomely bound in the Florentine style in vellum and leather. I took it up to examine it more closely when my eye fell upon this inscription in bold golden letters on the corner:—

Giuseppe Coracio—*dal suo amico*—
Rinaldo Salvi,
1875.

Rinaldo Salvi! Who was Rinaldo Salvi? Tito's brother? But had Tito a brother? I never heard of him. Strange. Perhaps Rinaldo was the name of Tito's father. But it was impossible that Tito's father had been the donor of that volume. He died some years previous to the date upon the book. There may have been a brother of whom I had never heard—perhaps he too was dead. *Chi lo so?* But what was Coracio's book doing here in Salvi's home—on the table in Salvi's library? I saw nothing to remind me of the Salvis, everything seemed to be connected with Coracio. The portrait, the books, now I saw many of them had his name on the fly-leaf.

"I have it," I thought. "He lives with them, and this is his private library." But this conclusion did not satisfy me. After

putting the foregoing questions and many others to myself, I noticed for the first time a silver tray with letters and unopened newspapers (evidently the evening mail which had lately arrived) lying upon it. I took up first one letter then another, afterwards the papers—they were all addressed to Giuseppe Coracio.

"Heavens!" I cried, "I am in Coracio's house and not in the home of the Salvis; that part of my dream was no fancy, so much was truth. Why had they brought me here?"

Ah! what use to ask the question?—"Wait, wait," I whispered, "the time has not yet come."

But why is she here? The lovely Eugenia, my Eugenia, why here in his house? I hated myself for the vile, unworthy thought that came to my mind. But the next moment fancy changed its colour. Why is she here? because she loves me, because here I have been ill, and because it was only here she could be by my side, easing my pain, speeding my recovery. These thoughts came to me like words of good cheer from an angel. For my sake she is here.

I started to rise and go to my room. My last thought the one spark of hope or comfort in my soul—fearful that Coracio or some one might come in and finding me downstairs, misunderstand my motive in leaving my chamber. This time as my eye fell again on the tray of letters, I saw an English newspaper partially unfolded (at least with the wrapper torn) lying beside it. I took it up, why I know not, unless the fact of its being an English paper in a foreign land made me desire to casually peruse its headings. My eye had no sooner fallen upon the first page than it met these words—words that chilled my heart and blazed like fire burning into my very eyes—they were printed in large type under the head of "*Personal*," and read: "Will the gentleman with luggage marked P. N. C., who procured lodgings at Cairn's Hotel, Russell Square, between eight, and nine o'clock on the evening of November 15th, communcate with the proprietor at once."

"P. N. C." These were my initials. A strange coincidence; I laughed when I thought it was now nearly six weeks since I was last in England. I read the notice over and over again. "November 15th." "To-day is December 20th. How long have I been ill under this roof? About five weeks they had told me." I talked to myself in whispers. "P. N. C., Cairn's Hotel, Russell Square." Yes, they were my initials. How familiar were the names "Cairn's Hotel and Russell Square." My mind confusedly endeavoured to remember when and where they had made an impression upon me. For a long time I looked at the words, perplexed, and haunted by them.

Where was I five weeks ago, Nov. 15th? Undoubtedly here in Florence, and yet what a vague memory suggested that in haste I had gone to England and as suddenly returned. Oh! I remember, those were the first days of my illness, days filled with delirium, and hourless nights made up of mysterious visions.

Perhaps in my dreams I had gone to this very spot. Yet what if all I had suffered was *in part reality*—"Cairn's Hotel, Russell Square," I remembered now the room, the stormy night, my loneliness, the face of the maid who had told me of Coracio and his companions, Coracio himself, Tito's letter, my disguise. Great Heavens! all, all of these memories were linked with that mysterious chamber of Cairn's Hotel. Surely it was not *all* a dream. What other man with name bearing my initials could have lodged within that house on the very day and hour when I dreamt I was there myself?

"I will tell Eugenia when she comes and ask her what events took place, and filled those first days." But on second thoughts, "No; I will answer the notice myself, for if not in reality, surely in my dreams I had taken lodgings in that very house."

I folded the paper, and placed it back on the tray, and once more looked about the fascinating room with its many unfamilar portraits. The large lamp-shade threw all objects save

those below it, into deep shadow. At last my eye fell upon a small table almost out of sight in a corner. What was it I looked upon that my eyes had seen before? Silver or nickel letters shining on a black surface; these letters spelt his name; "Coracio." I crossed to the table. A leather case bore the name; I could mention every article it contained. How forcibly did it bring to mind my disguise, the fever-painted eyes and cheeks, my monk's garb, all pregnant with the fear of death. The rosary—there it lay now before my very eyes at the side of the toilet case.

"Great God!" I smothered the words. "Am I still dreaming; am I again to be wracked and torn by demon-haunted visions of presentiment and murder?"

I could not keep my hands from these things so significant in their power to recall the past. I fingered the rosary—not unlike many of the same pattern, undoubtedly, yet exactly as I remembered the beads of my dream. I threw them down with a thought that living, unerring proof that I was a fated victim, was assuredly within my very hands. I grabbed at the case with silver letters, and by one effort forced it open. Yes, I was right, victims' bonds could have had no more conclusive evidence. How careless of Coracio to have left these things here, yet to whom were they significant save to Eugenia, the mesmerist, and myself. Here were the bottles, brushes, dyes, and cosmetics of my dream. I sank into a chair beside the table, I fingered mechanically the trifles of the case, I remembered the dumb lips of the ghastly vision whose unspoken words breathed murder and vengeance. Once more my soul seemed to link the import of presentiment with the misery of actual truth; the present seemed less real than the past I had discarded as an illusion.

"My fever is still upon me," I muttered, "and till my nerves find strength my mind will dwell upon these hallucinations." I was nervous and tremulous with suppressed excite-

ment. The fear that some one would come in and find me peering into other men's boxes, like a thief, caused me to step back a few paces. As I did so a scrap of paper covered with writing of a familiar hand, protruding from a pocket of the case attracted my attention. First glancing nervously about me, I snatched it up and scarcely believed my eyes as they riveted themselves upon the sheet and read "*Caro* Paul: I am about to send your trunk as you requested——"

I stretched out my hand and grasped a chair to steady myself. The letter fell to the floor. Was I living in some horrid truth, or was all the maddening, exasperating tortures for mind and body of my delirious dreams to be repeated? Once more I held Tito's letter in my hand, but had not strength or concentration enough to read it. The stupendous fact, that there had been no dream, but all stern reality, almost paralyzed my functions. It was no dream. I was in a band of liars—perhaps murderers—Eugenia among them—one of them. No, no, I dared not, could not, believe it. No devil or fiend incarnate could prove to me the woman I loved was aught but the pure and spotless angel of my dream-haunted sick-room.

I turned the letter over and over in my hand; the lines and words ran together, blurred and indistinguishable, till her name, Eugenia, stood out in letters of flame, and I must read on—the sentence her name began. Had I been blind the words would have forced themselves upon my consciousness. I read: "Eugenia is his victim, Paul, and with horrow untold I fear she may strike the blow."

Oh! what truth, condemning truth, was holding a sword above her head? Tito himself had suspected her. No longer could I doubt some murder had been done. She was suspected but why—why? Could any man believe this beautiful creature, my beloved, to be guilty of such horrid crime? Why, why had she lied to me? Perhaps after all it was not Tito who had been killed; was he not here with us? Oh! how

could I fathom the mystery? How much had I dreamt? How much had been actually experienced? And she, she, Eugenia! She his victim and suspected of the crime. Just Heaven! let me die believing her innocent.

I snatched the cursed paper from the floor and staggered towards the door, crawled up the stairs I know not how; all strength seemed to have left me for ever. I clutched the letter with the one idea that she must never know. I loved her madly, unreasonably, now that all the world—so it seemed to me—was against her. No, no, she must not see the suspicion in my eye or hear it in my voice. I would hide it and its cursed tale from her for ever. I reached my room, made a desperate effort to be calm—for in calmness lay my only salvation. I undressed, drank from a decanter of wine on the table, crawled into bed and having hid the letter beneath my pillow lay like one dead. Still I must wait if I hoped to gain anything in the end. All things seemed a greater mystery to me than ever. Eugenia's face remained as beautiful, as sad, as dear to me. I loved her ever the same. Let her be proved guilty a thousand times—still she would remain enshrined in my heart, the noblest, most glorious woman in the world. One thought gave me a measure of comfort: few could know of what wrong she was guilty—they would not be likely to criminate her. Many innocent women had been thought guilty before. It was incumbent upon me to remain silent. Each day, every word that fell from Coracio's or Eugenia's lips caused me to ponder, hungry to learn some truth which would give me a ray of light.

Then memory recalled that dreadful, damning paper possibly connecting me with the crime to which I had signed my name and Eugenia hers as witness, yet I could not blame her for that; was she not helpless at the time? My next search would be for that paper; as soon as I could leave my bed, for a day at a time, I would as opportunity presented, make a search for it. Undoubtedly Coracio had brought it with him to

the house. I believed that paper would only be used in case of great emergency, at the last moment when to free themselves from the penalty of the crime, Coracio, Eugenia and the rest implicated in the plot would force me to swear by the confession.

All these thoughts were torture to me in my delicate state of mind and body. I kept my self-possession, and Eugenia saw no change in me on her return to my bedroom. In a few words she explained to me the cause of Tito's departure. I knew she spoke falsely—for Tito was no more—still the time had not yet come for me to inform her of my discovery. I must know more. So, as I lay often pretending to be asleep, I listened to the conversation passing between Coracio and herself, hoping, praying, that word or phrase might escape them which would give me a clue to the plot, its motive, the hidden mystery and the secret of Coracio's power. My greatest effort was to keep before my mental vision the picture of Eugenia's loveliness, truth and purity. Evidence might be conflicting, even condemning. I must first know the plot, the guilty one, and Eugenia's part in it. But no word gave me a thread to follow.

One night I heard him plainly tell Eugenia that in a few weeks he would sail for America. I half opened my eyes at this piece of news and caught the expression of Eugenia's face. She seemed delighted as she listened, a load of care appeared to be taken from her being. I wondered what secret influence this man had over my love, and hated myself for wondering with jealous suspicion.

"Going to America!" I repeated mentally. "Are you then the murderer of my friend? wily, shrewd, and deceptive, so you can draw all men unto you? From what except the penalty of this crime do you wish to escape? Ha! Ha!" I silently laughed, "you will not escape; I will fall upon you unawares and strangle you till you beg for mercy—for a mercy you shall not know. So you thought you were playing with a child as you have played with a woman; I will teach you your mistake.

Ere you will have time to escape I will be strong again. I will plot, plot, and plot again as shrewdly as you have done till I know for certain every vile and guilty step in this affair.

What power chained me to my bed I know not. I hated this man with a saint's hate of evil. All self-restraint left me, yet I lay weaker than a helpless babe. Had I been strong, nothing could have saved Coracio then. I would have dastardly killed him in frenzy; torn Eugenia from the place and fled far, far away to other lands, as he in his heart hoped to do. In spite of myself, however, I remained calm. And soon my thoughts were interrupted by this remark:

"You will go with me, Eugenia." The words fell like a thunderbolt upon my head. On Eugenia they made a very different impression. She stood, drawing herself up to her full height. She cast a glance of scorn from her pale face upon him and said, in a tone, bitter, yet whispered,—

"Madman, you are a fool! Go with you to America! what I? I am only here in this house to be beside my murdered brother's friend, who has been so cruelly wronged. Your toy is not yet broken—were it you would cast it aside. Coracio, I have done with you forever." She passed before him.

"My God!" he hissed in her ear, "you love him; do not dare confess it; it is not safe. But my power is not yet spent; do not drive me mad or I will use it. Ours is a common secret."

I saw a look of pain and fear come into her beautiful face. As he spoke he grasped her wrist. "I will be calm," she answered. Coracio released her and smiled. I turned over and groaned as if troubled by a dream. This ended the conversation. I had heard just enough to increase my doubts and fears, but nothing I had heard was conclusive. I must wait—still wait. But events were evidently working to a climax. My illness had undobtedly prevented a worse fate and retarded the sequel to the work Coracio had already done.

The next evening I called up all the energy I possessed and soon after taking my dinner, which was brought me by Eugenia herself, got up, dressed, and sat by the fire, forcing myself to be patient, for patience only could aid me to learn step by step what work I had to do. Coracio came in and expressed his satisfaction at seeing me so much better.

"Sit down," I said, "I want to talk to you." With a sort of mock gaiety he drew a chair near me and sat down. It was true I wanted to talk to him. If possible to draw him out, to gain some knowledge, some word of truth.

"I am glad to see you so nearly restored to health," commenced the man whom I almost believed was my worst enemy.

His manner was decidedly solicitous, but in his eye a look rested which seemed to say,—"*Caro mio*, you are still in my power." In his power! Knowing Eugenia loved me, I feared nothing in spite of the fact that in time I might have all to fear.

"I have not had an opportunity to thank you before for your kind hospitality——" I began.

"Your friend Tito has already thanked me——"

I turned my face towards him, and I am sure my eyes must have flashed like living coals as he mentioned that name.

"He has been my friend so long, I am glad to be hospitable to one so near to him as you," continued Coracio.

"I know words are superfluous in a case of this kind," I replied, doing my best to hide my feelings and knowledge of the man who had befriended me. "In time I hope some act of mine may prove my gratitude; I also——"

"You are far from well yet!" interpolated Coracio quietly I wondered if he meant that my time in his custody had not yet passed.

"Mine has been a curious case, has it not?" I questioned, endeavouring as much as possible to appear ignorant of the true state of affairs.

"So says the doctor," answered my friend with a shrug of his shoulders. "We were considerably worried about you at first."

"I suppose so; and whom have I to thank the most for my recovery—*la signorina?*"

He bent his large, dark eyes upon me with a searching gaze. I grasped the tongs and pretended to poke the fire to cover my emotion.

"That might be a matter of opinion. I was going to say, were you in love with the beautiful girl, undoubtedly all the kindnesses of the household would be laid at her door."

"In love with her," I said, forcing a gentle laugh—"she is far too worthy for such sentiments from me. You yourself would fare better in a warfare for such a prize." I tried to keep the bitter stinging tone of jealousy from my words, but I am sure Coracio thought me a bit too earnest in my praise of her.

How at the moment I longed to know the truth. Had he then and there dared utter one word implicating her good name, then and there I could have made an attempt to destroy him as I was, and with the little strength left in my arm and fingers, take his life. But, guilty or not guilty, my time had not yet come.

"She is very beautiful," carelessly replied the handsome man, who must have felt his own power to charm man or woman at his desire.

"'Twould be happier for some women to be less beautiful," I replied—perhaps with a touch of sarcasm, "such faces as yours have been the ruin of many a beautiful girl."

"Your illness has made you prosy," replied Coracio, evidently at a loss to follow the drift of my conversation—the first of any length with him since my illness.

"My sickness has been a nightmare. Were half the visions I have seen reality, I should be prosy for the rest of my life."

"Well said," replied the mesmerist, who for the time seemed to have forgotten his occult power. "But forget your disturbing nightmares; through our help they did not kill you. You are ungrateful to refer to those tortures which have evidently caused you so much suffering——"

I smothered the words, "You are a liar," e'er they had a chance to escape my lips; but something told me that this man was doubly false. I closed my eyes as if to shut out the vision of murder, wrong and deceit that mirrored itself before them and quietly replied,—

"I have by no means forgotten your kindness in bringing me here to your house, when I was so suddenly taken ill. You know better than I can tell you how mysterious even now the whole affair seems to me, mixed as it is with half-remembered events and also the visions of fancy that have made such an impression upon me; it seems as if I can never forget them. Certainly I intended going to London, did I not?—But there, you did not know me well before I was taken ill. Tito is the only one who can thoroughly explain the case and I am sure he will do so when he returns."

Coracio pulled on his moustach, but did not commit himself by word or look.

"You are right, reality and fancy have become so strangely mixed and confused in your mind, you know not which is the truth; wait till Tito returns." This time he poked the fire, probably for the same reason as I had done, as he took the tongs from my hands.

It occurred to me that Coracio must at heart be ill at ease, and was evidently trying to sound me in regard to my position. One thing I resolved to keep from him; namely, my love for Eugenia. I marvelled, however, that he did not feel convinced of it.

"But, Coracio," I continued when he quitted poking the already blazing fire, "there is still something so vague to me

about this case, I think you, as master here, should be able to enlighten me somewhat. Tell me, why is Eugenia here?" He turned slightly pale, but quickly answered,—

"It was her whim."

"For her brother's sake—no?"

"Yes, she is very devoted to him."

"As she has been to me. But tell me, has she lived under your roof before, and is Tito an habitual visitor here, when I am not with him?" I saw somewhat to my astonishment that the question embarrassed him.

"Why was I not taken to Tito's home?" This last question relieved him; it was an easy one.

"You have never been to Tito's house, nor have you known his family," he answered negatively. "Perhaps you know as well as I do that there is a mystery connected with his relations that you have done well not to question your friend about; let this suffice. His home was not the place for you."

How well I knew there had ever been some vague mystery connected with Tito's parents, or at least with his near relatives —yet I had never questioned him or tried to gain his confidenee in this one particular. Little did I dream how near home this mystery would come to me.

"Tito's mother and father are both dead?"

"Yes."

"Has he a brother?"

"No—yes, excuse me, I only half heard what you said—I was thinking of something else."

"So Tito has a brother," I interrupted. "He never in all the years I have intimately known him mentioned this brother to me."

"You did well not to wish him to confide all to you. He had reasons and undoubtedly good ones for keeping his brother's name unknown to you."

"It is Rinaldo—no?"

"Yes."

I knew by the look in Coracio's eye that he believed I knew more of this brother than I would acknowledge. Here he was mistaken; I never had heard the name. Only seen it once, and then on the cover of a book in the room below, as the reader knows

"Where is Rinaldo now?"

"Perhaps dead."

His answer deepened the dye of mystery a hundred shades. I found no words with which to meet him. He had said enough. I did not wish to quiz him longer in regard to the relatives of my nearest friend. Of course just the information that would be valuable to me—that which would throw some light on my troubles—he would jealously guard and keep secret.

"Perhaps Tito will take me to his home when we leave here."

"In all probability, if you wish to go."

"I do wish to join him in his home, unless he will go with me to London."

"Do not attempt such a journey for some time; weeks may pass before you are strong enough to undertake it. You are more than welcome to remain here until some other place is more congenial to you." Coracio was making a desperate effort to be commonplace.

"Thanks very much, Coracio, you have already proved a friend to me; but I have no idea to impose on your good-natured hospitality."

"Tut, tut, the house is large enough to hold us all and my wine cellar is a good one. You will pardon the master if he runs away for a time; I am obliged to go Naples in a few days."

How dared he use the words "run away," I mentally ejaculated and added to his sentence "and thence to America."

"A cool devil, surely," thought I. "But the house will be empty, with Tito and the master gone. Will Eugenia remain?" I said aloud.

"Yes; and Tito will return in a few days. He has been my guest for weeks at a time."

I summed up the little information I had gained from him. He was to go to "Naples for awhile," in other words he was to sail for America. Eugenia was "to remain," in other words she was to go with him if he could persuade her to bear him company. Ah! but that I would prevent. I fell to thinking. Coracio lit a cigar and smoked in silence.

But it suddenly occurred to me that there was one more individual from whom I might learn truths that would put me upon reasonable grounds to form plans and carry them out. The butler—he would know many, many things private and personal in regard to Coracio, the Salvis, and perhaps tell me the murderer's name, if murder had been committed. Was man ever placed in a more confusing and mysterious position! Every one about me—even the woman I loved—moved, spoke and breathed in an atmosphere perplexing and unnatural to me.

"The Salvis have been very rich, have they not?" I said, interrupting Coracio's mental soliloquy.

"Money and the love of it is a curse," he replied, with a bitter smile. "Yes, Salvi is rich, better for him had he never had a *soldo*."

Reader, in that one sentence Coracio had opened my eyes. Money! if there had been a crime, money lay at the bottom of it.

"Many deem themselves more unfortunate for the lack of it," I replied, carelessly—half chuckling to myself for having acquired this new piece of information so unexpectedly. "I never knew of Tito's wealth ever having brought him misery."

"It is the family story—or at least part of it."

"Let us say no more about the Salvis," I replied, fearful of learning some horrid truth of fraud or crime; "one day Tito will tell me all if he wishes."

Coracio went to the table and poured out some wine, almost

draining the decanter. He handed me a glass brimful, and we drank a silent toast. I could not fathom his desires, but I drank to my own success—to Eugenia's love, and freedom once and for ever from the bonds of mystery that were compelling me to live a life of unrest and tortuous deceit. Having drunk to his satisfaction, Coracio looked at his watch, at the moment the hall clock was striking eight.

"I must be off, excuse me, I have an engagement." So saying he shook hands and left the room, and me to my own reflections.

What had I learned?—little enough. Some crime had been committed; I felt sure of it. Coracio wished to escape—in some way I must prevent him. Money had been the curse of the Salvis on Coracio's own word, yet his own wealth did not seem to cause him much trouble. Tito had left for some reason unknown to me; but he was soon to return. Tito had a brother, Rinaldo, living or dead; what could be the secret in regard to him that had made his name even unmentionable in my presence? Mystery more—still deeper mystery was all I had gained from Coracio. I was willing to believe the man honourable till circumstances proved otherwise. I was willing to believe him just, till I could prove he had been untrue to the woman I loved.

I had deferred answering the "personal" referring to P. N. C. and the hotel in Russell Square, desiring first to have foundation of truth for future movements.

IX.

WEEKS sped away, and the inmates of Coracio's Villa, myself included, led uneventful lives, that is to the outside world and to each other. Coracio had not gone to Naples, I believed the only reason for this was because he could not persuade Eugenia to accompany him. She still remained faithful and

devoted to me, but without one word that a lover would crave. Many, many times I was on the point of embracing her and calling her my own ; but a look quick and agonized came into her eyes and I dared not. Tito had not returned nor did any word come from him to me. Each day I wondered more and more at his absence, his silence. What could it mean ? I had grown to trust more in Fate and the Future to unravel this tangled skein than in my own adroitness or ability. Daily, hourly I was anticipating some event that Dame Fortune would bring to pass to open the portal of discovery, and lead me to a knowledge of the truth and only the truth of this strange, fanciful tale.

For many days I refused to leave my room, long after I had gained sufficient strength to go below. One thing impressed me more and more day after day. Eugenia was miserable. My love was always pensive and restless, painfully nervous at times. There was something she did not dare confide even to me, her lover. Many an agonizing thought filled me with fear that after all she might escape me, that the woman I loved more than all things on earth, and who unquestionably returned my love, might be torn from me by the man who seemed to claim her ; but why he claimed her I knew not. Each thought that united the two in sympathy seemed to stain the woman I desired to make my wife. Each look of suspicion I cast upon her seemed to leave a black scar for which I alone was responsible. No longer did I open my heart to her, no longer did I try to draw her out and say, "confide in me, thou, the loveliest of women, confide in me the most devoted of lovers, I who would be the most faithful of husbands." Coracio did not hesitate to leave us together, nor was there open cause for jealous fear on his part. He seemed to hold her, as with chains and bolts. No word escaped her lips with which he could find fault, no look flashed from her eyes for me that would bid even a more ardent lover than I was hope.

At last a day came when Coracio, and also Eugenia, with a smile of encouragement, insisted that I should go downstairs.

"To-morrow you may drive out," said my host, "we will both accompany you."

I succumbed as a child might have done. I took his arm. I went below and stood gazing into the face of the cathedral clock. I was taken through the *salon*. I was entertained with a description and the history of the marvels of art about the beautiful rooms. The exquisite statues, so well arranged about the apartments, charmed me into a forgetful mood. The lovely paintings held my fancy till I was weary with gazing on them. Here an Antinous stood with sad and pensive mien, half enveloped in a background of dark relief. There a Venus in matchless pose, filled a niche upholstered in crimson or blue. Venetian chairs holding cushions of antique silk in rich and heavy folds, delighted the eye and gave the room a breath of days gone by.

At last I was taken to the library. As I crossed the threshold all the misgivings and doubts flooded back upon me, as I remembered the night I had almost helplessly crawled downstairs to it, and learned that I was still a victim of a horrid scheme as exasperating as had been the fancies of my dreams. There hung the portrait of Coracio. I exclaimed at the resemblance as if I had never looked upon its face before.

"It is very like," replied Coracio.

"And what excellent colouring, too," I answered. "And are these of your father, your mother?" I questioned, "oh, yes, I can see the resemblance."

"Has no word come from Tito?" I asked, after gazing about me silently for some time.

"Oh, yes, a letter came a few days ago."

"But you did not mention it."

"No, for we look for his return daily. When your eyes are stronger you will find many books here to interest you."

"So I shall, judging from the contents of these massive cases."

"You can remain my guest as long as you like. Perhaps these volumes may inspire you to do some professional work when you are stronger. Why do you not begin a new Italian romance; a tale of your dreams?"

"*Grazie!* this is indeed an author's paradise. Inspiration seems a second nature in Italy, as Tito has often said. Perhaps I will take advantage of your kind offer."

At this juncture Eugenia returned. She seemed more cheerful than usual, and to me her beauty was marvellous. She had given up the dark habit she had worn almost ever since I had known her, and was now dressed in a combination of soft grey velvet and silk. Her hair was brushed back from her low forehead, relieving her beautiful profile.

"Bravo!" she exclaimed, putting out her hand. "It is a pleasure, *signore*, to see you out of that dreadful sick-room."

"Your good care has set me free," I replied, at the same time feeling jealous that she was no longer at my bedside, relieving my pain by her touch—or sitting silent for hours that I might gaze undisturbed upon her glorious features.

"Eugenia, your guitar has been mute a long time; let us salute Signor Castleton's advent below with a song," exclaimed Coracio in an amiable tone.

"Do you wish me to sing?" she questioned.

I knew she would grant the request, but felt that courage would fail her did she attempt to render one of those passionate, pathetic melodies Italians love so well. She blushed as she took the instrument from Coracio's hand; then her fingers swept over the strings, as if long forgotten melodies once more came to her mind; half unconsciously she twanged a measure; now a phrase, that fell upon my ear as had the very same, long, long before; then a melody yet more familiar vibrated tremulously from the instrument beneath her touch.

"Music is in her voice as in the throats of our own nightingales of Tuscany," breathed Coracio, seemingly to himself.

I listened, at first absently, as a song of my poor friend Tito came from her trembling lips; then my heart beat fast, my bosom swelled as echoed through the long-silent rooms the pathetic melodies of my friend. It was all dreamy and passionate. There was in Eugenia's voice that sympathetic quality which falls with so much grace upon the ear, the heart in painful rapture listens breathlessly, almost forgetting the sad, plaintive voice. As in a reverie, I heard once more the music of my friend. I closed my eyes to hide the picture of Eugenia's sad face, and eyes now filled with a tide of tears she could not stem; mine too moistened at the words:

"Desiderar e no poder avere."

The phrase trembled away in sweetest cadence, and the guitar glided from Eugenia's lap to the floor. A glance beneath her dark lashes told me she could not go on.

"You sing as of old," whispered Coracio to her caressingly. "Never had I heard another voice so sweet in Italy."

Eugenia arose and put aside the guitar, overwhelmed by conflicting emotions. She stepped to the window and hid the momentary expression of her face in the outside dusk.

"The carriage is at the door; will you drive to-night, *signore?*" she soon said, addressing Coracia.

"We will be off for an hour if you like," was his reply. "It is still an hour of dinner-time."

I thought it was with reluctance Eugenia consented, but in a moment more she had gone for her hat and wrap. I stood at the door and saw them depart. Eugenia's maid accompanied them.

"Fool, fool that you are," I inwardly exclaimed, as they disappeared beyond the curve of the drive, "to leave me here burning with jealousy and dismay; and filled with the knowledge that one or both of you are guilty of some crime!"

I was glad to inhale the cool, sweet, refreshing air. Soft rays

of light shot from a lamp across the drive, and the shadow of tall ilex trees fall upon the lawn. Sounds mellowed by distance came up from the roadway far below. On the lone hill beyond Galileo's tower a nightingale poured forth to Heaven his sweetest, saddest song. My being was awakened into new hopes by the benign influence of almost silent nature about me. I drank in each melodious sound and draught as if truth and goodness only could be distilled from so fair a night. Never before had I so fully appreciated the subtle glories of an Italian fading day—never had I known the intense fires of hope sweet nature ean kindle in the human breast.

"She loves me and her love will never die," I whispered. My answer came from the nightingale on the hill. I leaned against the door-pillar, wondering what course I had best pursue. An hour or more had been given me to be alone, to learn what I could, to search every available corner for a clue that would justify my claiming Eugenia as my own, and also to tell Coracio that he was now my victim—for soon I should know of what crime he was guilty.

I closed and locked the door, returned to the library, sat down to the table and examined the books, papers, letters, anything that I hoped might bear a word or sign of evidence. I found nothing—nothing I could utilize. Then I remembered Carlo the butler; I would ring for him, question him, torture him if need be, till I had learned all he knew.

I suited the action to the thought and rang the bell. Every moment was precious, for I knew not how soon Coracio might return. Carlo quickly responded to my ring. I settled down in an arm-chair with my back to the portrait of the master. I was filled with hopes, with fears. Each day the fear had grown stronger within me, that through some false step I might lose my lovely sweetheart altogether.

"Carlo," I ordered, as he entered, "bring me a decanter of your master's best masala."

"*Si, si, signore,*" he replied with his usual respect.

He soon returned with the wine.

"Carlo, you are old, infirm; sit down, I want to talk to you. My own weakness makes me appreciate your infirmity—you need not stand."

I made a gesture towards a chair near me which he obeyed. This man seemed five years older than when I saw him first, eight weeks before. His back was bent, his eyelids swollen, his step nervous and halting; but the same respectful manner often found in old servitors was with him, and he almost reverently doffed his cap, so respectful did he desire to be to his master's guest. I hardly knew how to open fire upon this personage of whom I knew so little. I fixed my eyes unflinchingly upon him, leaned forward and folded my hands.

"Carlo, how long have I been in your master's house?"

"A month, *signore,* perhaps longer."

"I have been ill, perhaps at the door of death. Many times they believed I could not recover, am I not right?"

"*Si, si, signore,* many nights I heard my master walk the floor till daybreak, thinking you would die before morning."

"Yes, he has been a worthy friend to me. How long have you been in Coracio's service, Carlo?"

"A few months only." He looked up and saw my surprise at his answer, then he added. "But from a boy I have been in the service of the Salvis, *signore.*"

"Ah! but why this change from one family to the other?"

"It came with many changes, *signore;* the master of the Salvis died, and soon after his good wife followed him."

"Why did you not remain with *la signorina* and the young gentlemen?"

"I did remain with them, but it was *la signorina* herself who wished the change."

"But I do not understand."

"This is Signorino Tito's villa, and not Signor Coracio's."

"Not Coracio's?"

"No, no *signore.* He only took possession of it a few months ago."

"Ah! I see! Then, Coracio, *la signorina,* and young Salvi are here together as members of one family?"

"*Si, si, signore.*"

"And Signor Coracio is master here?"

"*Si, signore,* he has been master since several months—more than ever after my young master Tito went away."

"Signorino Tito went away! when?"

"A few days before you came, *signore.*"

Then Tito had not been in the house since I came. Some trick had been played upon me, or had I seen a vision of my friend over and over again. The note found upon my pillow, then, was a ruse, a pretext, that I might not wonder at his absence. I swallowed a glass of wine, I drew my chair close beside Carlo, I placed my hand upon his arm.

"Carlo, there is something more I want to know. What of Tito's brother, Rinaldo; is he dead?" I remained almost breathless for his answer. The old servitor's eyes filled with tears at the sound of Rinaldo's name.

"No, no, not dead, he is here in this house."

"Are the brothers very like—could it be possible even in a darkened room to take one for the other?"

"Oh! *si, si, signore,* they are twins."

I sprang to my feet at this and grasped Carlo by the hand.

"Why, why have I not known this before? why have they never told me of this brother Rinaldo?"

"A cloud hangs over him, *signore.* A secret the family never tell. Poor Rinaldo is mad." A look of fear came into the man's eyes when he had made this disclosure.

"Have no fear, Carlo, you have but begun. You must tell me all you know."

"Oh! *signore,* I dare not, the master has warned me——"

"The master!" I cried in my heat. "I am the one for you to fear now, for I am desperate; do not dare to deceive me. You shall be well paid. Your master is an assassin. I am the man who will bring him to justice; deceive me and you shall share the penalty of his crime as an accomplice.

The old man trembled from head to foot. "Drink this," I said, giving him a glass of wine. "Carlo, what do you know of this fatal power your master possesses, to take people's senses and make them do his will?"

"That is why he is here, *signore.* He can charm poor Rinaldo in his mad fits and then soothe him to sleep."

"His control over the boy was unlimited. No?"

"Ah! *si, si, signore,* and I have seen the devil's light in his eye as he stood over the almost lifeless body."

"And what of the night when Tito went away?"

"I was told to go to the servants' apartments, and not to return unless called."

"You saw nothing of Tito after that?"

"No, *signore.*"

"Hark, what is that? It is the sound of the carriage in the drive." I drew some gold coins from my pocket, and put them into the servant's hand. "Go now," I said, "remember I am master here, say nothing of what has passed between us."

The old man reeled from the room, his face wet with tears. Coracio and Eugenia entered the hall. Forcing a mien of calmness I sank upon a sofa and pretended to be asleep. They entered the library, looked upon me for a moment, then left the room together.

The time for me to act was drawing near. I must see Eugenia, I must tell her what I had learned, I must learn the rest of the horrid truth from her own lips. My limited instructions to Carlo I thought would be sufficient to seal his tongue. I felt he had never liked his new master, Coracio, but had served him through fear, and for Eugenia's sake. He, Coracio,

then, had some claim upon the Salvis. He had taken possession of their villa and had been allowed to be master there for months.

I left the room and went into the hall; I knew Eugenia had sought her own apartments. Coracio had gone I knew not where. I did not wish to meet him till I had seen Eugenia. I returned to the library, rang the bell, and sat down to the table, and scrawled a line upon a scrap of paper.

"Take this to your mistress," I said as Carlo entered, "unknown to Coracio, as soon as possible."

He hurried away. It was an easy matter to deliver the note at Eugenia's door. I waited breathlessly for her to come to me. An hour passed and she did not respond to my request. I grew almost frantic with suspense. Every moment seemed like a lost priceless gem to me. I glared at the devilishly deceitful face beaming upon me from Coracio's portrait. I went to the table and searched its drawers for papers of some kind which might give me one more clue. In the second drawer I came across a revolver and a box of cartridges.

"I may have need of this," I whispered; "Coracio in an emergency would be a desperate enemy."

I quickly loaded the weapon and placed it in my breast. At that moment, in cold blood, I could have shot dead the man who had been the assassin of my best friend and cruelly wronged the only woman I loved in the world. Ay, I loved her at that moment, half guilty though I believed her to be, as deeply as I hated him. I loved her better than my own life.

At last Eugenia came. She looked even paler than usual. Intense fear o'erspread her features, and despair marked every gesture.

"My darling," she said hurriedly as she saw me, "it is not safe that we be seen a moment together to-night. Coracio and I have quarrelled. He is desperate, would commit any act. Excuse yourself; do not see him to-night."

"My loved one," I replied with all the fervor of my half-maddened being; "I am a match for him to-night for I too am desperate. Carlo has told me much; you must tell the rest. Who is guilty even yet I do not know. But, woman, you have deceived me, yet I love you madly. If your brother's blood is upon your own head, still will I forgive and love you."

In her agony she placed her hand over my mouth.

"Listen to me, woman, you must tell me all, everything this very night, or I will in sheer madness kill Coracio before to-morrow's sun. Deadly hate and revenge are all that master me now. Do you hear, woman, it will not be safe for you to trifle with me."

She clung to me as one in a storm clings to the spar from which he is almost torn by the blast.

"I will tell you all, though it kills me," she gasped. "Meet me at eleven in the ilex grove of the lawn. It is dangerous for us to be seen together here. Coracio may outwit us and do some desperate thing before morning."

His step sounded upon the stair. Eugenia fled from the library through a side door. I wiped the perspiration from my forehead. I knew my foe would be more calm than I. I knew it would be politic to meet him as if nothing had happened. I turned my back to the door and stood looking into the hated face upon the wall. I knew the night's work must decide my fate with Eugenia Salvi.

A few seconds more and Coracio was standing beside me. He placed his hand upon my shoulder. I dared not meet his gaze. I felt he knew we were rivals, worshipping, each in our own way, the same woman. He was the first to speak.

"Castleton, I had something to say to you to-night, but you seem too ill, too nervous. What have you been doing?"

I turned, met his gaze and quickly replied: "While you were driving I became fatigued reading some of your heavy volumes."

"Humph!" He smiled, turned to the masala decanter and produced two glasses. It was a way he had; he never wished to drink alone. I joined him and drank, toasting his prosperity. We sat down facing each other, both filled with a tiger's desire to outwit and perhaps destroy the other. I felt my self-possession taking wings. With a desperate effort I remained calm.

"Coracio," I said, "since you so hospitably took me in some weeks ago, we have been the best of friends. It was your wish that we should be. I have tried to bear out your desires in the matter. As your guest I have been a gentleman, have I not?"

It was a negative question, no need for a reply. I went on.

"But like the playing of little children this must come to an end. Do you ask why? Because we are rivals; we both love Eugenia Salvi."

I half expected he would strike me dead almost before the acknowledgment had left my lips.

"You own it then, do you? that you love this woman who has been——. Poor fool! I am sorry your clumsy English heart and head have led you to this step. You show little tact in desperate situations. I have befriended you in everything, and in gratitude you fall in love with this woman, who——"

Here he laughed, a short, metallic laugh, obscure in its meaning.

"Have you no suspicion in your nature, man? Where is your knowledge of human nature and the world?"

I laid my hand upon the handle of my revolver, yet fearing my heated blood would drive me to some ruthless act. Every time Coracio spoke of the woman I now worshipped more than ever, his very breath and tone seemed an intended insult to her honour.

"Do not say it," I hissed. "Do not fill me with more suspicion. What I already suspect is driving me mad. Take my warning, Coracio. I know more now than I dare believe."

I arose and stood before him, admiring for the hundreth time his noble physique and face.

He looked at me haughtily, but if anger was in his heart he succeeded in hiding it from me. I could see he was suffering from some great emotion, but he had the power to suppress it. He was pale; in fact his face seemed colourless.

"You know all or nothing," he replied, coldly. "Better for you, better for her, had no word of truth ever reached your ears. Sit down; your rashness hastens matters to a climax too soon. I would have saved you from the consequences; for her sake I have kept the truth from you."

"I am willing to face any consequences. Man, do you regard me as a hound, helpless with fear in the face of danger?" I remained standing, steadily gazing into his face.

"Your courage will avail you nothing."

"Scoundrel," I gasped, "you cannot intimidate me. I love Eugenia Salvi. I love the woman upon whom you have cast a spell, that makes her forget her duty to the man she loves—myself."

"Fool, you worse than fool," he exclaimed, for the first time showing a touch of anger in his tone. "Eugenia Salvi is mine. You think she would be your wife?" Here he smiled with diabolical fierceness. "Fool, she is pledged to me by an oath, and no power on earth can make her break the bond."

What use for him to speak plainer. Upon his face I read the truth of all he said.

"Quarrel with the woman, not with me," he said, "if she has given you false hopes."

Maddened thoughts of her faithlessness whirled through my brain and exasperated me. I could stand this man's cold, devilish eye no longer. I laughed madly as I laid my hand on the butt of the revolver in my pocket. I could not shoot my enemy, he was unarmed; nor could I contain myself longer."

"Devil," I shrieked, "give her up to me, to the man she

loves with a holy love; give her up to me, I say; unchain her soul from this damning spell, or I, an hour later will be answerable for your death."

The expression of triumph which crossed his features maddened me.

"Thou worse than devil!" I shouted, "take that for your insolence," and I struck him a fierce blow between the eyes.

A sound like the hiss of a serpent escaped his lips, while blood burst from his eyes into my face. He made a desperate plunge and clutched me by the throat. He was stronger and more muscular than I, and in a fair fight would have mastered me; but my first unexpected blow half stunned him. In spite of my hate, for the moment I pitied him: we closed like two fierce animals mad with rage, as if we would tear each other to pieces. He fell to the floor; I rolled over him. I was about to let him rise to his feet, when the ghostly vision of my murdered friend came before me. Once more I saw his upturned face—once more the horrors of that dreadful night absorbed my mind. Vengeance filled my soul. I was capable of any act. I drew the pistol from my pocket and placed it to his temple. My eyes were blinded with blood, his hand clutched my throat till his nails were buried in my flesh. The devil possessed my soul. I would have gladly died could I have seen this fiend reaping justice for his crimes. I exulted in my triumph for a second as I held him helpless, my hand upon the trigger. A moment more and his soul would be whirled into eternity.

Then a shriek, as from one tortured, rang through the house, and Eugenia rushed in from the next room, threw her arms around me, saying in a wild, excited voice:—

"Paul, Paul, do not for heaven's just sake stain your soul with murder. As you love me, let him live."

I could not shoot, I grasped the revolver by the muzzle and with the butt end struck my enemy one blow on the head and he lay as if dead—stunned. I reeled backwards on to the

sofa. Eugenia still clung to me, her white dress no whiter than her face and bloodless lips.

"This is horrible," she said in a faint voice, "perhaps he is dead and you are a murderer, Paul, let us fly; come, this very night, or I shall go mad. See, see, his eyes are setting. He is dead, my God, Paul, he is dead!"

Eugenia fell to the floor having fainted away. But I thought not of her; I sprang to the side of the helpless man. Had I killed him? Was I an assassin? I would have forgiven a thousand crimes to bring him back to life. Ah, revenge is not sweet, I know, I swear it, revenge is bitter with the dregs of hell!

"Coracio, Coracio," I screamed in his ear, I poured wine upon his head and between his lips. "Speak, man," I said, "you are not dead!" I raised his head. He opened his eyes. He was alive. He did not die. With the help of the servants we got him to his room and I sent immediately for a physician. Fortunately I had not shot him.

Eugenia soon came out of the swoon, and excitement combined with pity for one whom she had every reason to fear and hate, beamed from her lovely face, giving her the strength and power of goodness. No malice was in her heart, she would suffer as only a wronged and broken-hearted woman can suffer, but she would forgive her enemy even to the ninety-ninth time. Compassion for her helpless enemy nerved her with unnatural strength. We both stood over him. He said he would soon be better; and the physician assured us the accident would not prove a serious one. He had been stunned, that was all. Coracio slept. In an hour he awoke feeling much better.

"What a devil's hate this man must feel for me," I thought regretfully.

I at last was master in Coracio's house. A short explanation to the physician as to the cause of the affair, with a heavy fee of gold, proved quite enough to silence his lips.

"For the lady's sake," I said, "do not let this be known." He acquiesced at once and left the house, saying that there would be no need for him to come again.

What had I gained? It seemed to me nothing. In this man's eyes I felt myself a coward. I had not taken his life, but I had attacked him unarmed. Eugenia by her opportune approach had saved him. Coracio must have known that he had barely escaped the vengeance of a desperate man. He was bold and full of courage, his only mistake was that he had misunderstood me, trusted me too far. Now he lay almost helpless and I no longer feared him.

A new thought came to me; perhaps, after all, Eugenia loved this man whose slave she had been, for how long I knew not. I would see her once more and only once. I would let her decide my fate. I would give the woman back to her master did she wish it; stifle the love for her in my heart, then go away, forget her, forget him, forget the murder of Tito Salvi; forget I had sworn to avenge the crime, for perhaps she was guilty. I would let her go free. My love for her was even greater than my thirst for revenge.

In an hour Coracio was able to sit up. I left the room, having shaken hands with him and made the promise that I would take no further step to settle the affair till he had fully recovered. I could not repay weeks of devotion and care by treachery. How little I understood the man with whom I was dealing. Eugenia entered the room just before I left it. She complained of feeling ill and exhausted, yet unable to sleep. I left her alone with Coracio. No opportunity presented itself for me to mention our proposed meeting on the lawn in the ilex grove. Tortured as I was by my inability to clear away the mists from about the inmates of that fated house, I decided to place the sequel of events in Eugenia's hands. She and she alone must decide between us—Coracio or myself.

I stole downstairs, perplexed in mind to the library; rang

the bell, intent on interviewing Carlo once more. The old servitor was filled with grief and fear at what had occurred.

"The saints and the virgin have cursed the house," he piteously wailed, "*Santa Maria! Santa Maria!*"

"Carlo, we are drawing near the end," I said, "a little more and your master would have been a dead man, and I a murderer. But, Carlo, to-morrow I shall leave this fated place. Now, I want you to tell me the mysterious story connected with the Salvis and your master. Silence can do him no good, disclosure cannot harm you. Come now, tell this story in your own way, all you know of it."

For a time he seemed reluctant to obey me.

"There is nothing for you to fear, man, go on."

I will relate the substance of his story. The Salvis had been a rich family of noble birth. The curse of this family was insanity, which, though hereditary, was not inherited by all the children. Rinaldo was the insane one of the present generation. At an early age he showed symptoms of the affliction. For years no one could control him at the periods of his mental derangement. A father's influence availed nothing. A devoted and affectionate mother could do less to control his wild, maddened disposition. More than once, when they were boys together, he had attempted to take his brother, Tito's life. Still the afflicted family would not hear of his being placed in confinement. No physician had yet been found who could even temporarily aid or cure him. When the wretched youth had reached the age of twenty, Signor Coracio was introduced to the family. Immediately it was seen he could exercise by his occult, hypnotic power an influence upon the diseased brain. He proved congenial to Rinaldo. He became an inmate of the Salvis' home. He partially cured the patient over whom he had almost unlimited control. But an evil day came; Rinaldo quarrelled with his father and stabbed him, in a fit of insanity. The affair was hushed up, and more than one be-

lieved the old man committed suicide. Soon after Signor Salvi's death, the mesmerist met with severe financial losses; but little need had he to be disturbed. The grateful widow was more than generous, and made good in a measure his loss. But Coracio was not satisfied, and the evil in his nature which had been silent for many years, bestirred itself, and he became ambitious, jealous of his patient's brother Tito, and coveted the wealth of the family. The widow Salvi died soon after her husband, leaving her entire fortune divided between Tito and his sister Eugenia. But now, owing to his hypnotic talent Coracio was master of the situation. He hated Tito; he loved Eugenia. Again he met with financial losses. He coveted Tito's wealth. Still he remained faithful to his charge. He alone could influence the mind of the demented Rinaldo. Tito loved his unfortunate twin brother very fondly. He made his will, leaving everything to be equally divided between his brother and sister. In an evil hour Coracio learned of this, and in a moment of despair decided on poor Tito's destruction; then by some clever trick he would possess himself of his entire wealth. Coracio's patient was his toy, his tool; through him he would commit the act. Through this crazed brother, Tito was to meet his death. Coracio filled the poisoned cup, and with the devil's power all his own, bade the demented wretch hand to the fated brother the draught which would be his death.

I could not hear more. Coracio, then, was after all the murderer of my friend even though a helpless hand had struck the blow. Perhaps, as I heard the man Carlo speak, I regretted not having killed the mesmerist; but my love for Eugenia bade me be humane and considerate.

"Enough, enough! Carlo, you have told enough. Say no more or you will drive me to a still more desperate deed than the last."

I arose and left the room, filled with the horrid tale. Strange to say I now had no wish to bring Coracio to justice. All I

knew was what this servant Carlo had told me ; but the knowledge was not sweet. Reader, if ever murder comes before your eyes—if ever revenge absorbs your soul and mind, flee from any act which would stain your life with the hues of crime. There is something in the soul of a just man, which even when his enemy lies at his mercy will not let him kill. To forgive is better ; even the memory of the lost friend seems to fade away and becomes potentless when another's life—even an enemy's —hangs on the lifting of an arm.

I went to the front door and stood looking out upon the quiet night. The hall clock struck half past ten ; in half an hour I would seek the ilex grove to meet Eugenia. I would tell her once more of my love, my forgiveness. I would beg of her to fly with me on the morrow, to leave Coracio to the memory of his crime. We would fly to England, or, if she wished, to America. With her freed from the fetters and toils of sin, I could be happy anywhere. We would forget the past and live for each other alone, a life of bliss.

So I stood in that doorway, a man weak and tried, strong but in one thing, my love for this unfortunate woman. A woman who had been sorely tempted, yet had remained true even in weakness, to her every sense of truth and honour. And she, more noble for the trials her soul had fought with, was to be my wife if the power lay within me to revive the love of those first days in her heart.

X.

THE house seemed perfectly still ; the night was warm, calm, and serene. It was one of those summerlike nights which come to Italy even in the coldest season of the year. Even the air was hushed and the poplar and ilex trees betrayed no movement, standing spectre-like in the moon's tranquil light.

I stole quietly from the house; across the pebbly pathway and grassy lawn, to the clump of ilex trees beneath which I was to meet Eugenia. The air was spicy. The moon's rays seemed to distil from the dark leaves the odours of oriental nectar. I sat on a knoll under the trees, in the dark shadow, with my mind and heart expectantly awaiting the coming of the woman I loved.

What would her coming prove to me? What would the few near hours bring of change to my happiness? What confession had the lovely Eugenia to make?

I had not waited long when I heard her light step on the walk; then it was hushed in the grass as she neared me. I saw her move slowly along, in a hesitating, oppressed manner. The perspiration started on my forehead as I watched her enchanting, white-robed form cross the shadows of the moonlight. Oh! how my heart swelled with a holy love toward this angel, who with mystic influence and benign affection had entered my life as a vision of glory fills a dream. Of what crimes, of what weaknesses would I not forgive her and deem myself blessed in forgiving an angel so infinitely above me. My soul seemed to strengthen and expand as I contemplated the possession of this being who was not only a woman above women, but in the hereafter would be an angel above angels.

"Come to me, Eugenia," I whispered, "it is the past that oppresses you. Come, the future lies in me, if you will but accept it."

She heard my voice and her movements became a trifle swifter. I placed my arm about her and held her in ecstasy to my heart for a moment—a moment filled with the bliss of hours. Then I relaxed my embrace and held her hand. I felt she was mine for ever and evermore. But at that moment she was not herself. Some charm possessed her soul. I could account for this, she had just left Coracio.

"Eugenia, my darling, speak to me; throw off all fear. All confessions are forgiven before the asking. There is no longer a wondering in my soul; our souls are one. Confide in me; the dawning will be clearer than the night. The future, darling, will be brighter than the past."

Eugenia laid her warm cheek against my face.

"All fear is a dream," she breathed, "I do confide all to you —waking or sleeping, here, in Heaven and the Hereafter we are one; no separation can divide us, for the God within us links, with Divine influence, our souls."

I understood her; the mesmerist, even in his weakened state, had partially taken possession of her mind.

"If my soul is black with crime, you can see but its whitest shining. Paul, there is no more darkness in the world for us; your soul illumines even the Hereafter to me. Even the mystery of our love is divine—for your love has saved me. Hold me as you would protect a flower from the storm; you alone, have the power. Keep me as you would keep an angel from the filth of earth. God has sent you to me. God within you will give you power. Till now I have fought the battle alone."

She seemed entranced. I felt the influence bearing upon her mind and soul enter mine. That hypnotic influence which oftener dwells within the loveliest souls on earth than in more sordid hearts.

"If this is love," I answered, "your vice is my purity, my weakness is your strength. You are a being unfit for earth, the shadow of its guilt stains you; you are too pure to breath its atmosphere."

"To you, your words are true; to you I am pure."

She remained almost immovable as in a dream. With the calm night atmosphere about her she seemed to me the picture of living purity. Her passion, if passion she had, seemed to me to be woven with the meshes of chastity, open to daylight and the star-lighted heaven alike; and I raised my eyes to the lovely orb shedding silvery rays upon her head through the foliage of the trees blessing her womanhood. She paused awhile seeming almost asleep.

"Coracio loved me, but did not conquer me—his only hope was that I would be his wife," she whispered, and I thanked Heaven for the truth at last. While she spoke, her pale lips looked like marble, and her breath was like the perfume of

flowers. "The stain of his soul, the occult power of his mind and magnetism, almost chained my innocence—charmed me, but I love you only."

She looked confidingly into my eyes. Her words so simply spoken, with all the purity of innocence, fell upon my soul with benign influence. The tears fell from my eyes upon her hair. She did not ask the forgiveness I would have given her for a hundred wrongs but said,—

"I am yours for ever. Coracio lies asleep as if in death. I am safe with you to-night, for only the morning will waken him."

"Darling," I said, "do not breathe that hated name to me; I am still a man and am once more strong in arm and mind. My love for you could murder him. Do not tempt me. You are mine—mine alone for ever and ever."

I covered her white forehead with kisses and held her unrespondent form in my arms. Her love and the knowledge of her purity dissipated the mists of wickedness and darkness from my being.

"Paul, Coracio sleeps—he will not wake till the morrow." At her words I heard a movement in the trees, and saw his form crossing the grass-grown lawn.

"My darling, cling to me, he is there—look, like a damning spectre—he is there to terrify us with his occult power."

His form seemed white and ghostly as he approached us; his strong and handsome features, clearly defined in the moonlight were radiated with a golden astral hue. He raised his hand then turned and started in the opposite direction.

"He is there," breathed Eugenia, as I held her as in a vice, "but he is sleeping. The draught he gave to me will quiet him till the morning."

As she spoke his form faded as a vision, falling as if to stretch upon the ground. I felt a shudder creep from head to foot of the woman I held.

"Come," she said, "let us go into the house. I am weary and the night is growing cold."

She seemed to throw off in part the mystic atmosphere which

had surrounded her. Eugenia was once more partially herself. We crossed the lawn and entered the house. On the threshold I pressed a kiss upon her lips.

"My husband," she replied, and lifted her eyes to the starlit heavens with a sad far away expression as if her soul was gazing into futurity. I remained in the hall-way looking out upon the night, while she stole softly up the stairs.

"Mine for ever and ever," I whispered. "In spite of temptation's meshes and a devil's stain, your virtue is still the purity of my life."

Suddenly a scream, as from a spirit damned, rang through the house and pierced my ear with a sound of horror. Once only did it sound, coming from the room above. I leaped to the stairs and sprang like a hare from step to step, reaching the upper hall-way, then the chamber which had been my sick room. I entered the open doorway, and oh! horror, once more a vision of the infernal regions burst upon me. Upon the floor lay Coracio, dead, blood and foam oozing from his lips, and bending over him was my beloved Eugenia with livid face and wild, frantic eyes.

"My God! My God!! I have killed him, I have killed him! Look, look, Paul, your wife is now sin stained and a murderess. The potion he meant for me I put into his medicine. It was poison—he meant to kill me. I did not know it was poison; I thought but to make him sleep so he could not follow me to the grove. *Dio!* his soul is still enchaining me. I feel as if lost for ever."

She sprang to her feet, lightly stepped over the body stetched before her. Grasping my hand she dragged me from the room, saying, "Follow me, Paul, I say, follow me."

Frantic with dismay, and deeming my beloved half mad, I followed after her. On through the hall we rushed: up another flight of stairs, along corridors, till we reached the wing which ran back of the house. She stopped in her mad haste before a door, the key of which she took from her pocket.

"Now you will know all," she gasped; "there will be no more mystery—to-night I will tell you all."

She threw open the door. Seated in a corner upon a rude, wooden bench, chained to it, sat the image of my lost friend, Tito Salvi.

"'Tis Rinaldo," said Eugenia, "poor Tito's twin brother; he is mad."

Had I not already known it, there was no need to tell me that. Each look, each movement, told periodical insanity possessed him. We entered the room; I felt no fear. But one emotion filled me—sympathy. It seemed as if Tito, not dead but afflicted, sat before me. I loosed my hand from Eugenia's, and I stepped to where the maniac sat.

"Why this chain?" I cried. "Why treat an unfortunate wretch as a criminal, with injustice and not with mercy, enshrouding him with the atmosphere of a criminal?" I grasped the horrid chain with nervous force. "Fear not, Rinaldo," I said, "I am your friend, your brother."

Eugenia stood a few paces off in the shadow of the doorway appalled. She knew, as I did not, her brother's form of insanity. Sympathy alone moved me; I desired to free him yet from the hell which had possessed him. I found the lock to the chain which bound him; with a desperate effort I forced the tongue back from its place, and the brother of Tito Salvi, madman though he was, was free. The chain fell to the floor. I took his arm. I raised him to his feet.

"You are forgiven, Rinaldo," I said, "I am your friend."

The maniac clutched my arm and smiled. How like poor Tito's face and expression was his every look.

"Paul, Paul," whispered Eugenia, "it was he killed our brother."

"I know it all, Eugenia, be silent," I whispered. Rinaldo had caught her words. His face fell. A happy thought struck me.

"No, no, Rinaldo," I cried, "it was not you. I myself committed the crime."

Never shall I forget the look of joy which spread over the poor maniac's features, and he lisped with a glow of intelligence:—

"Then I have been dreaming, Eugenia. You, Paul, could not have killed him because you are his friend. Coracio did not, then Tito is alive, and I shall see him once more."

The maniac sank upon the bench simply satisfied. Tears filled my eyes as well as Eugenia's, at his joy believing his brother lived. I sat down beside him. I placed my arm about his neck. I drew the wretched fellow to me and persuaded him to leave the room with us.

"Bring Tito to me, again," said Rinaldo. "I want to see my brother. Perhaps Coracio is the only one who can bring him back."

Such pathos was in his tone, there was little use for me to try to check my tears.

"Yes, he will come back," I answered, "and, beside him, I will be your brother."

I saw I had an influence over the poor fellow, and prayed silently that I might help in time to bring him back to sanity and happiness.

XI.

AND now, reader, my tale nears its end. My enemy and the enemy of the woman I loved was dead. It might almost be said he died by his own hand. The draught of poison he in desperation had intended for my lovely Eugenia, he had taken himself from his own hand. His death filled her with horror. For some time in vain I strove to comfort her and plead her innocence. At last my great love conquered her fears and self-reproach.

I decided to leave the house almost immediately, taking Eugenia and Rinaldo with me. By right Rinaldo and Eugenia were sole heirs to the Salvi estate. What was Coracio's within the villa they were entitled to in a sense, as there was no one else to claim it.

We buried Coracio quietly in a cemetery outside of Florence. Then we closed the house, and taking Carlo with us, came to England. A year later I sold the villa, Eugenia not caring to live there even after our marriage.

From time to time she told me what she knew of the dreadful affair which had been poor Tito's end. Coracio had learned of

my intended departure from Florence. He plotted and planned the following night to poison Tito, using Rinaldo as a tool to commit the act. No sooner had I said, "Good bye" to my friend and was leaving the station, than Coracio approached him and they went together to the villa. One day later the murder was committed, coldly and deliberately. Rinaldo was mesmerized and knew not what he did. Tito's will was put into my trunk by Coracio so as to be found in my possession did the crime become known. This will he had destroyed on that eventful night in London. The reader knows how successfully his plan was carried out. The paper, which read as follows, I found upon his person soon after his death :—

I deliberately confess I am the murderer of Tito Salvi of Florence, Italy. The motive of the crime I will state in full before the public court and to judge and jury of her Majesty's law. Paul N. Castleton.

Witness,

Eugenia Salvi, *di Firenze.*

This document was only to be used in the emergency of the case going into court. Cordelli and Modenti had nothing whatever to do with the crime—they were hardly accomplices—but merely aids to Coracio to be at his call should affairs take a turn against him. To the world my disappearance from the small hotel of Russell Square remains a mystery.

Now my wife is by my side; she is happy, for the fatal past is never mentioned between us. Rinaldo in Tito's place seems a brother to me. Yearly, daily, the cloud upon his mind is being dissipated by the sunlight of our untiring devotion.

If at times a fearful memory of poor Tito's fate comes to me, I hide it from my darling wife, and keep it for the sad and silent watches of the night, and say to myself, for her sake I would joyfully re-live all the tortures of mind and body I endured during the days when I found her—a friend's victim.

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Stirling, August 1889.

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